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**Jacques Maritain, ‘l’esprit dur et le  
cœur doux’: an assessment of his far-  
reaching and fragmented legacy,  
including his contribution to Catholic-  
Jewish relations, as shown through *Le  
Paysan de la Garonne***

**by**

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Leigh Anne Casey

## Thesis abstract

Jacques Maritain, although now largely ignored in France except for opportunistic re-appropriations of his work, was and still is highly esteemed in North (and South) America. This thesis examines the extent to which Maritain himself is responsible for the unevenness of his reputation, besides the part played by relevant geopolitical events. It also questions how much his readers have contributed by selecting from the complex mosaic of his work those things which suit their purposes.

The thesis examines the core tenet of Maritain's work: the tension between the 'esprit dur' of his inflexible Thomist theology and philosophy and the 'coeur doux' of his liberal humanitarianism. This tension is examined from the standpoint of the Second Vatican Council and Maritain's response to those pivotal years in the Catholic Church, his self-declared testament, *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. Maritain's contribution to the Council and its aftermath, especially as applied to consideration of the Church's position on 'la question juive', helped to seal the fate of his jagged reputation.

The research analyses Maritain's key outputs contextually during a period of massive upheaval and shows their expansive influence. The dialogic approach to the works encompasses not only French but North American sources. The thesis also analyses correspondence between Maritain and his close friend Cardinal Journet, which has not before been the subject of significant analysis, enabling a deeper reading of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and what lay behind the book, fifty years after its publication.

This multi-disciplinary thesis, relevant to French studies, philosophy, intellectual history, politics and religious studies, makes a compelling case for a reappraisal of Maritain's legacy - an individual so often 'homme-carrefour', caught up in key twentieth-century events and yet also having a vital influence on them.

## Maritain's works: List of abbreviations

<i>Christianisme et démocratie</i>	<i>Christianisme et démocratie</i> (CD)
<i>Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant</i>	<i>Court traité</i> (CT)
<i>De Bergson à Thomas D'Aquin</i>	<i>De Bergson</i> (DB)
<i>De l'Eglise du Christ</i>	<i>De l'Eglise du Christ</i> (DE)
<i>Humanisme intégral</i>	<i>Humanisme intégral</i> (HI)
<i>Le Mystère d'Israël et autres essais</i>	<i>Le Mystère d'Israël</i> (LM)
<i>Le Paysan de la Garonne</i>	<i>Le Paysan de la Garonne</i> (PG)
<i>Man and the State</i>	<i>Man and the State</i> (MS)
<i>Primauté du Spirituel</i>	<i>Primauté du Spirituel</i> (PS)
<i>Reflections on America</i>	<i>Reflections on America</i> (RA)
<i>Sept leçons sur l'être et les premiers principes de la raison spéculative</i>	<i>Sept leçons</i> (SL)
<i>Une Opinion sur Charles Maurras et le devoir des Catholiques</i>	<i>Une Opinion</i> (UO)
Correspondance with Charles Journet:	
<i>Correspondance Volume V 1958-1964</i>	<i>Correspondance V</i> (COV)
<i>Correspondance Volume VI 1965-1973</i>	<i>Correspondance VI</i> (COVI)

## Introduction

Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a prominent French Catholic philosopher, whose broad and prolific output, besides over fifty books on a wide range of topics, numerous articles and volumes of letters to well-known contemporaries, included apparently, according to a number of commentators, a significant contribution to the drafting of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Although now considered a somewhat 'dusty' name in France<sup>1</sup> except for certain opportunistic borrowings from his canon of work, Maritain, who spent two decades in the United States, was and is still widely-read and admired in both North and South America. Furthermore, a rumour persists that he and his wife, Raïssa, are in the early stages of canonisation by the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> Thus, outside his homeland he is regarded still in many quarters as a man of influence. This was once the case in France too; he was a key figure in intellectual circles in 1920s Paris, de Gaulle sought him out and pressured him to write emotionally-charged propaganda during the Second World War as well as sending him to Rome as the French Papal envoy when the war was over, and in his later years he ignited a brief but frenzied storm in the wake of the Second Vatican Council with the publication of his self-declared 'testament', *Le Paysan de la Garonne*.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for Maritain's reputational decline in France are perhaps merely prosaic; nothing more than a reflection of changing preferences. As this thesis will show, for most of his life Maritain was an intransigent Thomistic Catholic wedded to dogma

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Molnar, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', *The Catholic World*, Vol. 204 (Mar. 1967), 368-371 (p.371).

<sup>2</sup> The clearest indication is to be found on the news website 'Rome Reports' (8<sup>th</sup> February 2011) in the item 'Beatification process for Jacques and Raïssa Maritain could begin'.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Le Paysan de la Garonne : Un vieux laïc s'interroge à propos du temps présent* (Paris : Desclée De Brouwer, 1966). Henceforth *Le Paysan de la Garonne* (PG).

and to the search for ‘truth’ and he had little time himself for changing fads and fashions in theology. His tone could be harsh and his philosophy both uncompromising and opaque. These qualities might struggle to engage the support of a modern audience. Yet within Maritain there is a tension which explains why some readers admire him today. Sitting alongside his theological constancy (or rigidity, depending on one’s outlook) is a social and political openness which shows Maritain ready to engage with all men, regardless of religious persuasion. It is this spirit that is captured in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and which endears him to so many, and it is the reflection of this generosity of heart as an exemplary Catholic ‘lay person’ that, if rumour is to be believed, may help him reach the threshold of potential sainthood. Yet even these qualities (and the achievements that have arisen from them) do not appear to have found favour in present-day France. After the controversy caused by *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in 1966, the conclusion to which appeared to be, in France at least, that Maritain was hopelessly out of touch with modern life, he almost disappeared from French public consciousness.

The thesis will examine the many possible causes of Maritain’s fractured reputation. It will show that the first likely contributory factor is the different geopolitical climates that exist and have existed in France, where Maritain is forgotten, and in the United States, where he is still respected. The second reason stems from choices that Maritain made himself: for example, his decisions to remain in America for so many years and to absent himself from Paris when the battle lines of existentialism, which was to set the direction of post-Second World War philosophy, were being drawn. The third resides in the very character of the man, which had a number of flaws that led to inconsistency and instability in what he said and did. He shows himself as someone who could be used, manipulated and abandoned by opportunists such as the atheist



right-wing activist Charles Maurras-and possibly even by his close friend Saul Alinsky. Furthermore, he tended to blame others for his decisions, attributing his involvement with Maurras's Action Française for example, to his spiritual adviser Humbert Clérissac. He could wilfully ignore issues that did not suit his current argument, like the racism that was prevalent in 1950s America. Furthermore he showed an inability to disengage from small-scale petty battles in the present moment, which undermined his credibility in the long-term (his campaign against Teilhard de Chardin in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* presents a striking example). Finally, besides Maritain's own actions, the thesis will also question how much his readers have contributed through self-serving selections from the complex and massive array of his works. In summary, it examines the extent to which Maritain himself and his readers are responsible for the destabilisation of his reputation, besides the part played by relevant geopolitical events.

The study examines closely Maritain's reputation in the area of Catholic-Jewish relations, one which has attracted praise and condemnation in almost equal measure and which typifies above all else his particular blend of 'l'esprit dur et le cœur doux'.<sup>4</sup> It contests France's nascent desire to portray Maritain as an unblemished hero of the Second World War- a presentation which has helped to assuage French consciences and to give a good account of national valour. Such a picture of Maritain can exist only if one ignores his theology and philosophy in which he deemed the Jew to be an unfulfilled Christian. Yet focusing on this 'other side' of Maritain does him a further disservice, one that can be contested not only by his humanitarian works but also by the demonstration of his determination to change the way the Catholic Church, as a body, viewed the Jews.

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Maritain, 'Réponse à Jean Cocteau', *Jean Cocteau Jacques Maritain Correspondance 1923-1963* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p.336.

As we shall see, through tracing his correspondence with his close friend Charles Journet, Maritain fought painstakingly for many years against the Catholic position that the Jews were ‘perfidious’: mortal sinners who, as a people, were responsible for killing Christ. Through his influence on *Nostra Aetate*, one of the key outputs of the Second Vatican Council, it will be demonstrated that he was able to help the Church as an institution to modify its stance towards the Jews, which in turn paved the way for closer Catholic-Jewish dialogue. This is a vitally important part of his legacy.

As well as showing his clear relevance to the modern-day Catholic Church, the thesis will also address the question of whether or not Maritain has left behind a tangible and meaningful influence on present-day American politics. The closeness of his relationship with Saul Alinsky, the American Jewish community organiser, is generally recognised. Alinsky’s influence on Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton is also widely acknowledged. What has been less obvious is the influence that Maritain had on Alinsky’s work (and vice-versa). It is evident that Maritain cajoled Alinsky into writing down his methods and making them more widely available. Without Maritain’s intervention, this may never have happened. Therefore, the thesis examines potential influences in order to determine whether there is a direct link from Maritain’s philosophy to American politics in 2014.

The research analyses Maritain’s key works contextually, in the setting of historic upheavals, and shows their influence, which is found sometimes in unexpected and even surprising places. The close reading of the works is dialogic and draws on international as well as French sources, such as Maritain’s near contemporaries Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas and François Mauriac. The thesis also analyses Maritain and Journet’s letters, which have not before been examined at a detailed level and

which provide significant background material for a deeper understanding of the lengthy genesis of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, especially of Maritain's intentions and addressees.

Chapter One follows the development of the Catholic Church in France and America during the twentieth century up to the years of the Second Vatican Council as well as tracing the trajectory of Maritain's theology and philosophy over the same period. This provides a backdrop for Chapter Two, which examines *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and assesses its worth as Maritain's testament by comparison with two of his other key works *Humanisme intégral* and *Primauté du spirituel*. Chapter Three evaluates Maritain's works about the Jews and Judaism, while Chapter Four places these writings in context by comparing and contrasting them with those of his near contemporaries. Chapter Five appraises Maritain's writings on the United States, his views on America as the embodiment of ideal Christianity and traces his influence to the outputs of Alinsky. Finally, Chapter Six weighs up the impact of Maritain's reputation in both France and the Catholic Church, examines why he has been largely forgotten in France and shows where and how he has been selectively revived.

Yet even if one can identify and even prove Maritain's legacy to the Catholic Church, Catholic-Jewish relations and Stateside politics, why would one want to resurrect him in modern day France, where Catholicism is becoming ever more an irrelevance and American influences leave many cold? This question becomes even more pertinent when one considers how critical Maritain was of France during his time in the United States and how unfavourably he compared his homeland with America, not only in terms of its attitude to religion but also because of the very character of its culture. The answer is likely to lie in his social philosophy with its underpinnings of tolerant pluralism and personalism as a credible alternative to both extreme right and

left-leaning politics. Maritain was always keen (even anxious) to point out that he did not subscribe to either end of the political spectrum and his policies encompassed a wide range of views from mild socialism to capitalism. Ironically, although it was this social side of his work that Maritain himself valued least, this is the area in which people, or non-Catholics at least, are now becoming most interested.

The conclusion to the thesis builds the case for a reappraisal of his legacy, fifty years after the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. Maritain, an overlooked figure for decades, yet influential in so many key events of the twentieth century, brings a valuable socio-political message to a Catholic Church which in 2014 is in the process of re-building itself after scandal. It is also renewing itself under the leadership of a Pope who, while never diluting his own principles, is unafraid to reach out and initiate dialogue between warring factions and global parties in dispute. Furthermore, he is a Pope ready to harness the worldwide network and massive machinery of the Church to bring about practical social justice in such areas as people trafficking. And just as significantly, Maritain has much to say to France and her European neighbours at a time when the far right is starting to rise again and closed forms of nationalism threaten peaceful co-operation. Maritain provides an exemplary template of the balance between the rights of all men to hold independent views and yet the support they can and should provide to their fellow human beings. This thesis, through its distinctive and original combination of a wide lens, which takes in the United States and a large proportion of the twentieth century, and its detailed focus on French consideration of 'la question juive', argues the case strongly for reinstating Maritain to prominence.

## Chapter One : The context for *Le Paysan de la Garonne*

### Introduction: two contextual aspects

This opening chapter establishes the context for *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, giving a necessary prelude to the examination of the work itself in the next chapter. The review focuses on two fundamental aspects. The first is Maritain's metaphysics, theology and philosophy, all firmly Thomistic, which constitute the unchanging underpinning of his work. The second is the path taken by the Catholic Church in the lead-up to the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s, which is of critical relevance, as *Le Paysan de la Garonne* is presented against the backdrop of, and responds to, this pivotal moment in the Church's history.

### Introduction to aspect one: Maritain's metaphysics, theology and philosophy

Published in 1934, *Sept leçons sur l'être et les premiers principes de la raison spéculative*<sup>1</sup> is both the earliest and also the cornerstone of the trio of Maritain's works dedicated to metaphysics, which includes *De Bergson à Thomas d'Aquin, essais de métaphysique et de morale* (1944) and *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant* (1947). Glimpses of his metaphysics can be caught elsewhere, most notably in *Distinguer pour unir: ou, les degrés du savoir*, but works dedicated solely to the subject comprise only a slim collection when compared with the rest of his prodigious output. Nevertheless, although small in number, these three works provide a consistent and clear picture of Maritain's position.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Sept leçons sur l'être et les premiers principes de la raison spéculative* (Paris : Téqui, 1994). Henceforth *Sept leçons* (SL).

*Sept leçons* contains the texts of seven lectures that Maritain delivered in Spain during 1932 and 1933, together with a preface written in 1934. Chronologically, the book falls between the final phase of Maritain's involvement with Action Française in the mid to late 1920s and the works in which he deals with social and political issues, beginning in 1936 with *Humanisme intégral* (which was also based on a series of lectures delivered in Spain, this time in 1934). For much of the early 1930s Maritain, perhaps bruised from his recent battles with Charles Maurras et al. was ensconced at Meudon and concentrated his efforts on speculative philosophy. The influence of St Thomas Aquinas on his metaphysics, present since his conversion to Catholicism in 1906 under the guidance of the Dominican priest Humbert Clérissac, became increasingly apparent during this period, as heralded by his 1930 biography of St Thomas, *Le Docteur angélique*. Indeed, the subtitle and opening sentence of the first lecture in Maritain's *Sept leçons* are, respectively, 'Le thomisme vivant' and 'Le thomisme n'est pas seulement une chose historique', which illustrate clearly his desire to place Thomism at the very heart of contemporary life. Maritain had already warmed to this theme in *Le Docteur angélique* when he spoke of St Thomas's 'action présente et toujours efficace [...] ce n'est pas d'un thomisme médiéval, c'est d'un thomisme perdurable et actuel que nous parlons'.<sup>2</sup>

Because the lectures summarise Maritain's philosophical position so succinctly yet comprehensively, a précis and brief analysis of their content is relevant. At the outset, in his first lecture Maritain stated that, although it is essential that one studies it in its correct historic context, Thomism is able to transcend time because of its superiority over all other philosophies. Straight away, this distinguishes his position from that of, say, Etienne Gilson, who saw Thomism as firmly rooted in its historical context.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Le Docteur angélique* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1930), p.vii.

In fact, Maritain maintained that the importance of Thomism is more fundamental than even this superiority suggests, because, as well as surpassing every other philosophy, it harmonises them 'dans une synthèse absolument transcendante' (SL 5). As a 'living' philosophy it is able to provide a total solution for modern-day issues; and not just for those of a theoretical and intellectual nature, but also for practical and social concerns. This emphasis on the non-negotiable absolutism and truth of Thomism coloured Maritain's work for the rest of his life, as a reading of the much later *Le Paysan de la Garonne* makes evident. In fact, in this particular work he was, if anything, more openly scathing about what he saw as the general tendency to venerate the novel and fashionable at the expense of the eternal. Even on the Mass card for his funeral in 1973 we find inscribed three quotations about truth from the Gospel of St John, including the phrase 'the truth will set you free'. Maritain maintained that the permanent and unbending truth of Thomism contained a time-defying vivacity, being 'toujours jeune' (SL 6) and making it indispensable for all ages. Furthermore, rather than merely appreciating Thomism passively, Maritain insisted that Catholics had an active duty to defend it against 'modern' individualism and to proclaim overtly the wisdom of its teaching. Presaging his later work, Maritain even criticised those Thomists who had not roused themselves quickly or proactively enough to its defence, as a result of what he claimed was their intellectual laziness. Such was Maritain's certainty about Thomism that he even rejected the term 'Neo-Thomist', one which had been bestowed on those at the forefront of the revival of Thomism after the First Vatican Council and was represented best by his then friend and mentor, the redoubted advocate of rigid 'strict observance' Thomism and fierce opponent of modernism, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange. In the preface to *Le Docteur angélique*, Maritain stated firmly : 'Il y a une philosophie thomiste, il n'y a pas une philosophie néo-thomiste. Nous ne prétendons pas inclure du

passé dans le présent, mais maintenir dans le présent l'actualité de l'éternel' (p. xi). He developed this point in *Sept leçons*, insisting that the term 'Neo-Thomist' implied a progress by substitution, in which the 'le *néo* mangerait le thomisme' (SL 18). He compared the process of philosophical substitution unfavourably with what he saw as the legitimate process of technological substitution (exemplified by, for example, the replacement of the stage coach with the railway), concluding that one must not confuse the art of the philosopher with the art of the tailor because 'la vérité ne reconnaît pas de critère chronologique' (SL 8).

#### **Introduction to aspect two: the path taken by the Catholic Church in the lead-up to the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s**

The journey of the Catholic Church to the Second Vatican Council began in the late nineteenth century, with the revival of Thomism at the First Vatican Council. This was intended to rally the faithful into one flock which spoke with the same voice, and also to present a solid defence against the rise of 'godless' positivism. However, it became apparent very quickly that Thomism was less of a genuinely heartfelt unifying device and more of an inadequate sticking plaster. Although rigid adherence to its teachings was promoted relentlessly by the likes of traditional Dominicans such as Garrigou-Lagrange, gaping holes appeared time and again, with challenges raised in the first half of the twentieth century by Emmanuel Mounier, the attributed founder of personalism, and by Gilson. The splintering picked up pace after the Second World War when objections were raised not only by Jesuits such as Henri de Lubac, but also by adherents to the Dominican heartland such as Yves Congar. These protests eventually opened up schisms that could only be healed by a massive regrouping. Sadly, the attempts to heal them through the chosen form of this regrouping, the Second Vatican Council, were not as



successful as had been hoped. As shown by the intense debate that greeted the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in 1966, feelings on the subject of Church unity ran high even after the Council closed. All the same, what was achieved, if not complete healing, was the pragmatic and rather weary acceptance by most participants that a degree of plurality of views, if not altogether welcome, was inevitable.

Why was Thomism chosen in the first place to help bring Church factions together? Fergus Kerr states that its revival came about because of ‘the Roman Catholic Church’s rejection of attempts by distinguished Catholic theologians to rethink Christian doctrine in terms of post-Cartesian philosophy’.<sup>3</sup> In other words, Pope Leo XIII and his successors, supported by teachers and foot soldiers like Garrigou-Lagrange and Clérissac, resurrected Thomism as a suitable defence strategy against the onslaught of modernism. Kerr puts it graphically in another work; Thomistic philosophy was there, he says, ‘to inoculate them [Catholic theologians] against infection by the idealist, subjectivist and positivist philosophies, which were held to have created “the modernist crisis”’.<sup>4</sup> Gerald McCool writes that Leo XIII was keen to separate theology from philosophy so that some engagement with modernism, in the form of a strong, coherent argument, could be presented against philosophy, without running the risk of entangling in the debate, and thus compromising, the mysteries of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Thomism could be unpicked into two different strands of theology and philosophy and so was an ideal tool. However, the debate on how exactly Thomistic philosophy was to be deployed in this battle continued to evolve well into the twentieth century and as Helen James John puts it: ‘if the medieval heritage was to have for the twentieth century more than

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<sup>3</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas. A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.110.

<sup>4</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), p.39.

archeological value, Thomists realized, it was in dire need of epistemological foundations'.<sup>6</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange was a key figure in the laying of these 'foundations', through what came to be known as 'strict observance' Thomism. The list of modernist, potentially dangerous, opponents to this particular Thomistic school became ever-increasing, even taking in even Maritain's old tutor Henri Bergson who, in his presentation of an alternative to positivism, had argued for the prominence of intuition over empirical evidence and had met with initial favour. However, his philosophy also advocated the primacy of 'becoming' over 'being', a position which was opposed directly to the focus on the metaphysical 'being' of strict observance Thomism. This narrow focus, when taken to extremes, says James John, resulted in 'an elaboration of logical principles, universal but empty' because, for adherents of Garrigou-Lagrange's brand of Thomism 'the real, but contingent, existence of sensible beings is for them practically devoid of philosophical interest'.<sup>7</sup>

In *From Unity to Pluralism: the Internal Evolution of Thomism*, McCool traces the story of the Thomistic revival from Leo XIII's 1879 *Aeterni Patris*, which accorded Thomism its central position in Catholic theology and gave it its consistent message, to the Second Vatican Council, which marked the end of this exclusive prominence, and explains how, in the intervening decades, the apparently solid rock of (Neo) Thomism shattered into pieces. He traces the evolution of this fragmentation and demonstrates how the different schools of thought influenced key players at the Second Vatican Council. The differences appeared early, he says, with one of the main conduits to the break up of Thomistic unity emerging right at the beginning of the twentieth century with Gilson's focus on the framing of the medieval texts of St Thomas and others, not as

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<sup>6</sup> Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p.3.

<sup>7</sup> James John, *The Thomist Spectrum*, p.13.

absolutes, but instead as works formed in their own historical context. Gilson's theory was that a line could be traced from early Greek philosophy through the philosophy of the medieval doctors (of whom St Thomas is generally accepted as the most significant) to the beginning of 'modern' philosophy with René Descartes, even though the philosophy of the Middle Ages was bound up inherently with theology and faith and 'modern' philosophy was resolutely separate from it. In Gilson's view, St Thomas's many commentators had made a fundamental error in equating his philosophy with that of Aristotle. It was this, said Gilson, that had allowed St Thomas's philosophy and theology to be picked apart, so that the former could be used as a method with which to engage with (and a weapon with which to attack) modern philosophy. As far as Gilson was concerned, St Thomas's philosophy was an integral and inextricable part of his theology. McCool comments: 'Such an unwarranted transposition of St Thomas's philosophy to the order of a "pure" philosophy - which was content simply to avoid contradicting the theology it systematically ignored - did violence to the essential nature of the Angelic Doctor's thought.'<sup>8</sup> Gilson, therefore, stood out from and was at odds with one of the central tenets of the Neo-Thomist movement. And dealing a further blow to the enforced 'oneness', Gilson maintained that the medieval doctors themselves were, actually, far from united in their beliefs, as was commonly represented, and had as many differences as similarities in their approaches. Thus, the apparent harmony which was claimed to have been handed down from St Thomas and his fellow doctors looked, in fact, far more like a form of pluralism. Gilson had much in common with Maritain (for example, they shared a realist philosophical position), but his view of Thomism, with its emphasis on historical context and the unbreakable link between its theology and

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), p.170.

philosophy is very much at odds with Maritain's unwavering belief in a philosophy that is separate from theology and which transcends time.

### **Maritain's Thomism and its impact on his metaphysics**

So what does Maritain's version of Thomism look like? What indeed is Thomism? St Thomas Aquinas, a key thirteenth century Dominican Church scholar, was not always held in high esteem. He certainly did not leave a band of followers behind him on his death. The term 'Thomist' was never coined in his lifetime; as Kerr says: 'his distinctive positions were originally defined by his adversaries'.<sup>9</sup> These positions, ranging from theological and philosophical to social, were often rejected. The first significant example of his teachings being taken up in any systematic way was, in fact, over two hundred years later in the sixteenth century when a group of Spanish theologians, against the backdrop of colonisation and the often vicious treatment of native peoples, began to consider theories of human rights (something which the avowed Thomist Maritain is now best known for himself), using Aquinas's teachings on the soul and on justice. His theological teachings on agency and potential (considering questions such as: 'is man pre-destined?' 'What is free will?'), were hotly disputed by Dominicans and Jesuits over the next few centuries. It was only in 1879 that his realist philosophy rose to prominence and became, although not wholly successfully as we have seen, the official philosophy of the Church, practised especially by Dominicans. After his conversion to Catholicism under Dominican guidance, Maritain's path led, inevitably, to St Thomas.

One of the most fundamental aspects of 'Thomist philosophy' is the centrality of the idea of the 'mystery' of being. Maritain defined reality as a 'mystère intelligible' (SL 8). Referencing Gabriel Marcel, he maintained that every scientific question presented a

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<sup>9</sup> Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas, A Very Short Introduction*, p.102.

double aspect: a 'mystery' (which relates to the object as it exists outside the mind) and a 'problem' (which relates to the internal process of understanding). The 'problem' in its theoretical pure state, devoid of the element of mystery, is merely intellectual, with no ontological context, and exists only as something which needs to be 'solved'. However, Maritain insisted, mystery is not the enemy of understanding, as Descartes would have us believe. Instead, both the act of understanding and the object of knowledge itself are 'mysterious'. In the act of understanding the intellect becomes what is 'other' and introduces into itself 'une réalité inépuisable (transobjective) vitale ment saisie comme objet. L'objet, c'est le réel lui-même [...] l'autre qu'elle [l'intelligence] assimile' (Maritain's italics, SL 9). Thus, mystery and understanding go hand in hand.

Unfortunately, although the proper object of understanding is the mystery of 'being', this mystery is, in Maritain's terminology, just too pure for man's limited intellect. As a result, 'being' puts up an impenetrable barrier to his understanding. Yet, crucially, even though man's understanding of it can be only partial, this does not mean that the mystery itself (for example, God, heaven and miracles) does not exist. Philosophy and science are both concerned, to differing degrees, with mystery. Maritain couples mystery with philosophy, a theme he returned to many years later in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*: 'Une philosophie qui n'aurait pas le sens du mystère ne serait pas une philosophie' (SL 10). In addition, there is something he calls the 'supreme mystery', that supernatural mystery which is the object of faith. Certainly, he says, intellect alone cannot absorb the complexity of this. Thus 'mystery' dominates where knowledge is most ontological and where one looks to discover intuitively the secrets of being, 'being' itself and the spiritual. The 'problem' aspect dominates (but never to the total exclusion of 'mystery') in mental constructions, empirical knowledge and the science of phenomena, in mathematics where the objects are constructed by the intellect, and do

not exist outside the mind and, particularly, in craftsmanship and applied science. It is only where the problem aspect prevails, that one solution can legitimately follow and replace another. Where the mystery aspect is dominant, the intellect has to make progress, often painfully slow progress, by penetrating the same object ever deeper: 'L'esprit demeure sur place, il gravite autour d'un centre, ou plutôt il pénètre de mieux en mieux une même épaisseur' (SL 12). In summary then, all things are a mixture of 'mystery' and 'problem', and it is only the proportions that vary. This distinction becomes a very relevant one when Maritain discusses the subject of Judaism and 'la question juive' (as we will examine in more detail in later chapters). Despite the existence of practical problems which can be solved, even if only with difficulty, the situation of the Jews is, for Maritain, first and foremost, a mystery which can never be solved, only contemplated.

The purpose of Thomistic philosophy is to provide a never-changing intellectual instrument and a firm continuity of system and principles to help man make as much progress as possible into the depths of non-substitutionable Thomistic theological mystery. Maritain described the relationship thus in *Sept Leçons* and did so again in a very similar way decades later in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. He warned against 'des esprits systématiquement novateurs', imploring the reader to respect 'la rigueur des principes' (SL 17). He conceded only one exemption from the rigidity of Thomistic principles, acknowledging that they could be renovated (but not changed) for modern audiences; something which, he maintained, even St Thomas did with truths in his own day. Yet, for other Thomists, even this level of flexibility is debatable, as noted by Richard Peddicord in his book on Garrigou-Lagrange, *The sacred monster of Thomism*.<sup>10</sup> However, others go further than Maritain, arguing that St Thomas, were he alive, would

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism* (Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2005).

go beyond any 'renovation' and would build a new, modern philosophy as, in fact, he did in his own day by choosing and adapting the (then considered) avant-garde and controversial philosophy of Aristotle. According to Aidan Nichols, the debate about the relationship between theology and philosophy in the Catholic Church (and, indeed, in Protestant churches too) is one which has always been present, throwing up many different views ranging from a fundamental distrust of the very role of philosophy (would it try to usurp the role of theology?) to a rejection of the Thomists' subscription to a 'once-for-all philosophy that will remain forever the chosen handmaid of theology', on the grounds that any single philosophy, even Thomism, has to be subjective and selective by its very nature, no matter how much it may protest its objectivity.<sup>11</sup> For Maritain, Thomistic philosophy was like a baby which stayed the same and entire, nothing being added or taken away, and yet still developing into an adult, becoming ever stronger and better proportioned over time and more profoundly and perfectly himself, while simultaneously adapting to the adult circumstances that surround him. Thus, although adjustments to Thomism might have to be made to suit modern taste, such editing is, in Maritain's view, merely superficial, because the fundamental truth always remains constant. This theme is one we can see very clearly in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*.

In terms of defining 'being' itself, Maritain insisted that he saw this precisely as St Thomas did. Metaphysics has as its object 'being' in as abstract a sense as possible, isolated as far as it can be from any particular object, and, as such, it sits 'au terme le plus élevé de la connaissance naturelle' (SL 25). It was in this arena that Maritain himself worked until his attention turned to the more 'practical' philosophy of

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<sup>11</sup> Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p.53.

*Humanisme intégral*. Classic Thomism preaches that 'being' has two aspects. The first is 'essence', which Maritain described as the positive capabilities of existence, and the second is 'esse', defined as 'being' in the strictest sense and the supreme actuality of what something truly is. Therefore, one can see both the object as presented to the mind, and also the potential of the same object. In this sense Thomas Cajetan, one of St Thomas's most prominent commentators, was able to say: 'ce qui existe n'existe pas' (SL 26). Maritain concluded that metaphysics (described by St Thomas as the 'universal science') and other lesser sciences investigated different aspects of 'being'. As the empirical sciences concern themselves with a fairly basic incarnation of 'being' (observable and measurable phenomena), Maritain stated that the scientist can know nothing of the real meaning of 'being'. This was a direct challenge on his part to positivism. He compared the high level of 'being' found in metaphysics with something he called 'le sens commun' (SL 36), pre-scientific, natural, irrational and spontaneous and also more universal than any particular science. He called it almost a rough sketch of metaphysics, which every man was capable of, although it could not be actual metaphysics, otherwise everyone would be a metaphysician (and it is only, he commented rather disdainfully, showing the elitism that emerged from time to time in his work, the metaphysician who has 'un perfectionnement fort élevé et fort rare de l'intelligence' (SL 37)). In his later book *Approches de Dieu*, Maritain showed slightly more generosity to the common 'connaissance naturelle pré-philosophique',<sup>12</sup> to which he now attributed an intuitive innocence that could bring man much closer to God than the corrupting rationalism of Descartes. Later still, in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, he had progressed to bemoaning the modern world's loss of this fundamental and vital primordial instinct which had, he said, set it entirely on the wrong path.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Approches de Dieu* (Paris: Alsatia, 1953), p.18.



Much of Maritain's explanation of the nature of 'being' is a shadow definition, concerned with what it is not. So, in summary, it is neither the particularised being of the sciences, nor the vague being of common sense. He also confirmed that it was not the 'being' divested of reality in the proper use of logic, nor the pseudo being of decadent logic (Maritain claims, patronisingly, that he is seeking to protect the philosopher from falling into the dangerous trap posed by pseudo being). As for defining that which 'being' actually is 'dans toute la pureté et l'amplitude de son intelligibilité propre ou de son mystère propre', sadly, only a select few are, Maritain said, capable intellectually of hearing the nature of 'being' as it 'whispers' to them through the objects around them, of grasping both its 'caractère transcendantal et [...] sa valeur analogique'<sup>13</sup> and of understanding its nature which is 'comme transobjectivité consistante, autonome et essentiellement variée' (SL 52). Nevertheless, he attempted to help his struggling readers grasp a crumb of understanding by describing the relationship between the external object and the intellect and the different lights each transmit which, if the intellect is strong enough and if it is quiet, disengaged and prepared to listen, reciprocate in a form of 'intuition'. He contrasted this meaning of 'intuition' with the interpretation of his old mentor Bergson, who, he said, denied that intuition was intellectual at all. Yet, without the power of intellect, it was not possible to grasp 'la révélation d'un mystère intelligible caché' (SL 55). He accepted that those who were not metaphysicians might, if they were very lucky, experience this insight, but it is given to them only as a fleeting gift. On the other hand, not all philosophers (Immanuel Kant, for example) were metaphysicians, because such insight passed them by completely. Again, he returned to this theme in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*.

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<sup>13</sup> Maritain, *Approches de Dieu*, p.18.

Maritain outlined three possible paths which might lead one towards the acquisition of intuition, drawing on the diverse figures of Martin Heidegger, Marcel and Bergson. Maritain had a very ambivalent attitude towards Bergson and it emerged again in the 1944 collection of essays *De Bergson à Thomas D'Aquin*.<sup>14</sup> In the essay 'La métaphysique de Bergson' (the first draft of which was written in 1936), Maritain debated even the title, questioning whether Bergson really was a metaphysician. Whilst lauding Bergson's modesty and morality, he undercut this almost immediately by calling him an empiricist (hardly flattering, coming from Maritain), although he attempted to sweeten the pill by calling his brand of empiricism 'le plus intelligent et le plus raffiné' (DB 13). He dealt another back-handed compliment when he credited Bergson with the great accomplishment of awakening a desire for metaphysics in Maritain and his classmates, but then failing to deliver any metaphysical vision. Instead, said Maritain, Bergson's work tended towards the philosophy of morality and religion (DB 16), with only implied metaphysical principles, especially a sketchy type of intellectual intuition, which were never clearly expressed. However, his stroke of genius, said Maritain, was : 'si la science des phénomènes enveloppe et dissimule elle-même dans son ordre propre et dans son objet formel une étoffe métaphysique, cette étoffe ne peut être que le temps' (DB 29). However, this very insight had its price or 'ransom': an irrationality which smothered Bergson's 'primitive' version of intuition.

Ultimately, in Maritain's view, all three paths cover empirical ground and none allows the 'heavy veils', which mask the true nature of metaphysics, to fall away. Furthermore, he said, rational analysis has to go hand in hand with intuition, and analytical proof is needed to fend off attacks from both idealists and empiricists, who

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Maritain, *De Bergson à Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris : Hartmann, 1944). Henceforth *De Bergson* (DB).

would wish to do away altogether with the entire concept of existence and ontology. So, although intuition is needed to cross the threshold, the nature of 'being' must still be confirmed by reason and has to be given an intellectual underpinning.

### **Maritain's Thomism: the 'true form' of existentialism?**

In the second lecture of *Sept leçons* Maritain took a detour to discuss the term 'existential', attempting perhaps to demonstrate that the constant core of Thomism could be renovated for a contemporary audience. He equated existentialism with 'esse' and metaphysics, and went on to call Thomism 'an existential philosophy', that is, in the speculative sense. Metaphysics, he maintained, uses corruptible existence, to enable it to draw conclusions, by analogy, on the spiritual. Thus, as the senses are still indispensable a metaphysician (Thomist) must be not only an intellectual, but also someone who lives in the life of the day-to-day world. In this everyday life, Maritain stated firmly, the Thomist must not adopt a political stance, but take instead an objective position, 'above all particularisation', as he commented a few years earlier: '*Le thomisme n'est ni de droite ni de gauche; il n'est pas situé dans l'espèce, mais dans l'esprit*'.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, as well as being existentialist in a speculative sense, Thomism is existential in a second, more practical sense because it is engaged in concrete acts and lays hold of existence to regulate and determine it. There is also a third sense. The thinker, instead of yielding himself to objective being, draws and assimilates objective being into his own subjective being. Maritain built on all these principles later in his life and their importance to him grew as existential philosophy became ever more prominent during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1947 Maritain published *Court traité de*

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<sup>15</sup> Maritain, *Le Docteur angélique*, p. viii.

*l'existence et de l'existant*,<sup>16</sup> a work in which he attempted to address the roots of existentialism, its various schools, their differing 'corruptions' (in his view) and the true nature of existentialism: found, naturally, in St Thomas's work.

Existentialism is a very broad 'church' and one key differentiating factor in its many versions is, of course, a belief in God or an active atheism. Maritain shared his Christian faith with Søren Kierkegaard (viewed retrospectively as the 'father' of his own branch of existentialism) and with his fellow Catholic convert Marcel (one of the earliest French 'existentialist' writers in the 1920s). Christianity and existentialism are not necessarily mutually exclusive, even if existentialism is associated popularly with atheism. Certainly, the most prominent existentialists were atheists, and, like Sartre, saw the need for the individual to make sense of the world for himself in the absence of an objective reality, operating from the position that there was no God. In terms of philosophical roots, what existentialists do have in common is the belief that existence, as real being, takes precedence over essence. Where they differ is in their views of the importance or even the presence of human essence and possibility, concepts that are at the heart of Thomism. The timing, in 1947, of Maritain's *Court traité* is interesting, given that Sartre's seminal work *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, based on a lecture delivered at the end of 1945, was published in 1946. At that time Maritain was the French Papal ambassador, living in Rome and absent from the hive of activity of post-war Paris, which included the lively debate that greeted Sartre's work. *Court traité*, with its references to Sartre, could be interpreted as a response to *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, revealing Maritain's desire to join the debate, even at a distance. Yet, rather than engaging with the discussion in its late 1940s, post-Second World War

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Court traité de l'existence et de l'existant* (Paris : Hartmann, 1947). Henceforth *Court traité* (CT).

context, Maritain's method of response was to link his 1947 work back to 1934's *Sept leçons*, with the 'eternal' themes this book introduced, and then to build on its position. This decision on the part of Maritain may have weakened the book's influence, at a time when France (and French intellectual life) was keen to leave the recent past behind. Interestingly, Maritain made exactly the same choice nearly twenty years later, at another time of enthusiasm for the future and 'progress', by linking *Le Paysan de la Garonne* to his past works. To some, this may look like a form of determined perversity. To others, it may appear admirably and consistently authentic.

So, in the introduction to *Court traité* Maritain repeats many of the points he made in *Sept leçons* and even employs the same vocabulary. The reader hears again his insistence that he is not a 'Neo-Thomist' (he now styles himself as a 'Paleo-Thomist') and his determination that we must not confuse the art of the philosopher with that of the tailor. He blames the same philosophers (Plato, Descartes, Georg Hegel et al.) for the parlous state of philosophy in the modern age. He repeats his point that a philosopher cannot be a philosopher if he is not a metaphysician and lists the very same definitions of non-being that he gave in the second and third lectures of *Sept leçons*. His mission was, he said, to re-establish the prior rights of St Thomas to existentialism, and to reclaim this for him, whilst accepting that St Thomas never called himself an existentialist (nor a Thomist for that matter). Thomism, he said, is the true form of existentialism because it deals with existence (being) in its totality, does not confine itself to a study of a series of essences and relies on the power of both intuition and the intellect. We have, Maritain says, two choices when defining what existentialism is and is not: 'Dans un cas on affirme la primauté de l'existence, mais comme impliquant et sauvant les essences ou natures, et comme manifestant une suprême victoire de l'intelligence et de l'intelligibilité' (CT 12) (this he calls authentic existentialism). Or there

is the other way, where 'on affirme la primauté de l'existence, mais comme détruisant ou supprimant les essences ou natures, et comme manifestant une suprême défaite de l'intelligence et de l'intelligibilité' (CT 13). This he calls apocryphal existentialism. As both esse and essences are intrinsic parts of being, eliminating essences means destroying being. For Descartes, 'will' replaced essence and when applying this concept to God, the result is that God will use his power randomly. In St Thomas's eyes, and therefore in Maritain's, this constitutes blasphemy. In Sartre's existentialism, God no longer exists at all, and there are no essences or common nature, only 'le chaos d'apparences visqueuses et désagrégées d'un monde radicalement irrationnel'(CT 16), where man is doomed to fail time and again in the face of ever changing situations. There is even a perversion of the Thomistic principle that existence precedes essence (as act precedes potential). Existence does indeed come first in these other forms of existentialism, said Maritain, but as there is no essence to follow and no human nature, man can exist and yet still be nothing. All that man is and can be is a set of actions, which he takes in 'liberty', in pursuit of random options, with no absolute standard of morality. In framing man in this way, says Maritain, employing the language of the ambassador he was at that time, Sartre's brand of existentialism has no stature and no grandeur (CT 21).

In *Court traité* Maritain takes the reader through the same process of visualisation that he had set out in *Sept leçons* and contrasts this with how he claimed other existentialists saw external objects: not as trans-objective subjects which present themselves to the mind through intelligible objectivisation, but as passive obstacles, which interpose themselves between the mind and existence, and whose subjects can be reached only by subjectivity. True existentialism, declared Maritain, reveals that God has an essence, which in turn is reflected in man's essence and in the essences of every living thing. To make sense of being, man, through his intuition and intellect, grapples

with the essences of the existents (ens) that he sees, and immaterialises these essences in his mind. Judgement restores these essences to existence and to the world of subjects. Therefore, judgement is for St Thomas 'l'achèvement, la consommation, la perfection, la gloire de l'intelligence et de l'intellection' (CT 33). It is through this act of judgement that unity, broken down in order for us to understand it, is restored to the transobjective subject. Therefore, judgement is a mysterious super-intelligibility which conveys in itself the very act of existing (esse). In Maritain's view other schools of existentialism made a fundamental error in disregarding this crucial issue and in limiting themselves only to existents (ens) while treating only this sole aspect of existence as 'being'. True metaphysics, on the other hand 'dégage de la connaissance du sensible où il est immergé l'être dans ses valeurs propres' (CT 48), extracting itself not from existence, but from the materiality of empirical existence. It is this focus on metaphysics, said Maritain that singles Thomism out from all other kinds of existentialism, and ensures that Thomism is its one true form. Grudgingly, he did extend some praise to other forms of existentialism in the area of moral philosophy, especially in their concept of the liberty of the individual, but never flinched from promoting both the absolutism of Thomism and its fundamental differences when compared with 'modern' existentialism: that is, that Thomism is a rational philosophy and it considers being and intelligibility in each and every one of its different aspects.

### **Maritain and Personalism**

As well as engaging himself in existentialism Maritain involved himself in personalism. This too merits a brief consideration in order to gain a full picture of his philosophy. Personalism, like existentialism, was a movement which served as a collective for philosophers with broadly similar viewpoints, which varied considerably on points of

detail. It developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a reaction to what was perceived as the dehumanizing effects of materialism and positivism. The thread that held together these different participants was the focus on the unique value of each person and the respect for free will, and yet also the driving imperative for each individual to engage with his or her community. These vital strands are what distinguish personalism both from individualism (which has no communal aspect) and overly-collective positions (which, it was said, demean the singular dignity of the person). However, the sheer breadth of the movement, so especially vast in its early stages that it is a struggle to give it the title of a movement, permitted diametrically opposed philosophies, such as idealism and realism, to be housed under the same overarching roof (Michael Kelly talks of its 'generality' and says that as an ideology it 'embodied a set of values shared to a greater or lesser extent, more or less consciously by an important section of the population'<sup>17</sup>). 'Idealistic personalism' took as its starting point the creation of reality by each individual person, and owed much to Hegel. 'Realistic personalism' began instead with the creation and existence of an independent reality against which the person is valued and plays a unique role. In France, the key figure in the personalist movement was Mounier, an opponent of liberalism and Marxism. Encouraged by Maritain, he founded the journal *Esprit* in 1932, providing a platform for discussion of personalist concerns against the prevailing backdrop of economic turbulence and encroaching fascism. Many adherents to the 'realist personalist' camp were Catholics (although, in true personalist style, it also housed atheists) for whom it was God who had created the independent reality. A clearly defined sub-group were adherents to what was known as 'Thomistic personalism'. Reflections of this brand of

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Kelly, *Pioneer of the Catholic Revival: The ideas and influence of Emmanuel Mounier* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), p.52.



personalism can be seen in the work of a diversity of figures, including Gilson and Pope St John Paul II. Maritain himself could be bracketed with this group, particularly when considering those works which deal with social and political matters, such as *Humanisme intégral*, and his often-attributed involvement in the drafting of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948 by 48 countries and which appears to draw on his work, in particular on 1942's *Les droits de l'homme et la loi naturelle*). These outputs perhaps demonstrate best Maritain's personalism in a social context, with their emphasis on the importance of the inherent dignity of the person, irrespective of either the political and social system in which he or she lives or his or her physical state.

Maritain's apparent allegiance to 'Thomistic personalism' might be viewed as the lynchpin that unites the very different aspects of, on the one hand, his metaphysics and theology (which incline very strongly towards the unifying strict observance Thomism of the likes of Garrigou-Lagrange) and, on the other hand, his social and political philosophy (which deviates sharply from right-wing Catholic views in such things as his lack of support for General Franco during the Spanish Civil War). Whether and, if so, how these themes might be joined together will be explored further in Chapter Two.

## **Catholic theology after the Second World War and the lead-up to the Second Vatican Council**

### **Developments in Europe**

Having explored the development of Maritain's version of Thomism the chapter returns to the second contextual aspect and examines Catholic theology in the decades before the 1960s.

During the years that followed the Second World War, at the time when Maritain was involved in his United Nations work, while also serving as French ambassador to the Vatican and producing *Court traité*, significant developments were unfolding. In 1946, the Jesuit Henri de Lubac published *Surnaturel*, a milestone work in the history of what was becoming known as 'la Nouvelle Théologie'. This presented a real and increasing threat to Neo-Thomism in the twentieth century, especially in the fragile post-war period. However, its quick rise to prominence left it vulnerable to sustained attack from the Neo-Thomist camp. One of the strongest and best-known of these was launched by Garrigou-Lagrange himself in a 1946 article entitled 'La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?' He likened 'la Nouvelle Théologie' to modernism because, he said, truth was forced to mould itself both to action and to life in its developing state rather than the judgement of the human being having to conform to the truth of intuitive reality and its unchanging laws. De Lubac himself, although viewed as a leading light in the 'new theology' movement, never actually subscribed to being a part of it. Instead one of his aims was to recover the 'ressourcement' of pre-medieval Christian tradition that pre-dated even the times of the scholastic doctors including St Thomas, and to go right back directly to the Patristic legacy. Inevitably, this meant that the 'ressourcement' stretched back to the Old as well as to the New Testament. Richard Crane and Brenna Moore comment that, through his great knowledge of Judaism and his twin desires to return to prominence the Old Testament, a text Christians shared with the Jews, and to re-educate Christians about their own religion, so that the horrors of Nazism could never happen again, de Lubac was a guiding figure of the spirit that 'helped crack the Christian theology of contempt and helped conceive the documents of

*Nostra Aetate*.’<sup>18</sup> Influenced by his reading of Gilson, de Lubac concluded that Thomism was not, in fact, timeless, and that the very teachings of St Thomas had been edited and interpreted by his commentators, especially by Cajetan, to such an extent that they did not always bear true witness to the original. By these means he was able to insist that he was not introducing something new to Catholic theology but that he was retrieving and uncovering what John Milbank calls ‘an authentic tradition’.<sup>19</sup> De Lubac maintained that Neo-Thomism had launched too tightly controlled an attack against modernism, with the unfortunate consequence that this had stifled debate within the Church. Instead of ivory tower isolation from the world, the ‘new theology’ now sought a dialogue with it. Furthermore, in *Surnaturel*, de Lubac struck two heavy blows at the root of what the Neo-Thomists held dear. Firstly, he stated that the nature of man is destined always to be with God, that grace is automatically God-given and that man is an inextricable blend of the divine and human. If, as the Neo-Thomists argued, there was a human as well as heavenly outcome for man, the divine and the human must become disengaged and besides leading to a disdain for and a downgrading of matters of the body, this separation would make it easier for non-believers to seize the human side and claim it for their own secular world. He aimed the second blow at what the Neo-Thomists believed to be the linked but essentially separated relationship between theology and philosophy. De Lubac, like Gilson, stated that the two had, in fact, an unbreakable bond. Milbank describes this as ‘a new sort of ontology-indeed in a sense a non-ontology-articulated *between* the discourses of philosophy and theology, fracturing their respective autonomies, but tying them loosely and yet firmly together’ (his italics).<sup>20</sup> Much harm had been done, said de Lubac, by the separation, because philosophy had

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Crane and Brenna Moore, ‘Cracks in the Theology of Contempt: The French Roots of *Nostra Aetate*’, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* Vol. 8 (2013), 1-28 (p.23).

<sup>19</sup> John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), p.4.

<sup>20</sup> Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, p.5.

been left to the mercy of modernists, and this had achieved the exact opposite of what Pope Leo XIII had hoped for in de-coupling philosophy and theology. In the Church's desperate scramble to cling onto whatever unity it still had post-war the eventual consequence in 1950 for de Lubac was a Papal teaching ban (as it was for many others at the time, with even Maritain himself under threat, it has been rumoured <sup>21</sup>). Yet forgiveness and reconciliation were less than a decade away. Invited back into the fold by Pope St John XXIII, de Lubac played a key role at the Second Vatican Council, although, like Maritain, he too was later to detach himself from what he saw as modernist interpretations of the Council's output. This was not the only thing they had in common as de Lubac, like Maritain, had been greatly attracted to personalist philosophies in the 1930s. This demonstrates a close link between their attitudes to social philosophy even if there was a clear gulf between their theological positions.

Other voices were being raised against mainstream and conservative Thomism in the first half of the twentieth century. Hans Urs von Balthasar, a graduate of the Jesuit school but not always (permitted to be) part of it in a formal sense, criticised the official line on Thomism because, in its rationalism, it gave no place to the glory of the Creation, an integral part, he maintained, of early and medieval theology, but which now was forced into the domain of artists and poets.<sup>22</sup> The result, concluded von Balthasar, was that Neo-Thomism was left in an isolated position, cut off not only from the natural sciences, but also from the creative arts. Karl Rahner too questioned the existence of a purely intellectual intuition, instead viewing knowledge as something that arose from the interaction between mind and world. In addition, Rahner championed the concept of 'anonymous Christianity', in which a latent form of Christianity (and its saving grace) is

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<sup>21</sup> As described by Sandro Magister in the article 'The Credo of Paul VI. Who wrote it, and Why' on the website 'Chiesa'.

<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/204969?eng=y> [accessed 17 November 2014].

<sup>22</sup> Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, p.126.

deemed present in all people, even if they are not practising Catholics. This viewpoint was, ultimately, very influential on one of the Second Vatican Council's most prominent pronouncements, *Lumen Gentium*, and echoes of this can also be seen in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in Maritain's precise delineation of the different type of grace people may hold. Bernard Lonergan, influenced by Transcendental Thomism and, in particular, by Joseph Maréchal's work which connected Thomism with Kantian idealism, rejected the separation of philosophy from theology and supported instead an examination of their unity in the context of history and individual experience (including the cultural and personal background of the individual). Like the Neo-Thomists, he supported the importance of judgement but differed from them by stating that there was too much emphasis on the objectivity of this judgement, when, in fact, it was attained by minds that were very individual and, hence, subjective. Significantly, challenges to orthodox Thomism arose not only from those in the Jesuit camp, where one might expect them, but also in St Thomas's (and Garrigou-Lagrange's) own homeland of the Dominicans. The most notable of these questioners was Yves Congar, a key figure at the Second Vatican Council, student of Maritain and, in his youth, influenced by Garrigou-Lagrange (and by Marie-Dominique Chenu, another student of Garrigou-Lagrange who had a later falling-out with his mentor over the ever-vexed question of whether or not Thomism should be looked at in a historical context or whether it was absolute, above and outside time). As the years passed, Congar's attitude to Thomism changed to such an extent that when talking about Maritain in an interview televised in 1967, he commented that Maritain adhered to 'un thomisme extrêmement franc, presque virulent même'.<sup>23</sup> In 1950 Congar raised the thorny issue of Church reform. This, along with his involvement in the

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Journet and Jacques Maritain, *Journet Maritain Correspondance Volume VI 1965-1973* (Saint-Maurice : Editions Saint-Augustin, 2008), p.407. Henceforth *Correspondance VI* (COVI).

worker-priest movement and his strong ecumenical beliefs and practices, led to him, like de Lubac, receiving a Papal teaching ban. However, again like his Jesuit counterpart, his exile from the Vatican mainstream was short-lived, and in 1960 he too was invited by Pope St John XXIII to play a key role in the pre-work for the Council. Among his many contributions to the Council's achievements, his work on the difficult and protracted drafting of *Dignitatis Humanae* stands out.

In summary, to followers of Garrigou-Lagrange's version of Thomism, such challenges represented, at the very least, a flirtation with the dangers of modernism. On the other hand, to those outside his camp, they demonstrated, not an outright rejection of Thomism, but ways of making it more meaningful to the faithful in the twentieth century.

Although the current Pope, Francis, was not present at the Council, (he was still a seminarian and not ordained until 1969), what were the positions of his two predecessors? Both Pope St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI were young and relatively junior at the time of the lead-up to the Second Vatican Council and both played advisory roles during it. Looking at their later pronouncements, it can be seen that Pope St John Paul II subscribed to a belief in the close links between personalism and Thomism and also supported traditional Thomistic teaching. His position was, therefore, very similar to that of Maritain. In fact, he praised Maritain for his interpretation of Thomism, agreeing that it is eternally true and stands outside time. Where Pope St John Paul II did deviate from the position of, say, Garrigou-Lagrange was his insistence that Thomism should build good relationships with other faiths and philosophies, provided that they could find common meeting points and interests in the metaphysics of being and, in particular, in God as pure Being. Again, as will be

demonstrated in Chapter Two, this is very similar to Maritain's own position as demonstrated in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. In his overtures to Judaism, Pope St John Paul II went far beyond the position of even the Second Vatican Council, declaring that Catholics should respect the Jewish faith as it is, and not seek to change it. He made very public and controversial (in some quarters) entreaties for Jewish forgiveness for Catholic wrongdoing. Therefore, in his social and political philosophy, as well as in his theology and metaphysics, he had a considerable amount in common with Maritain. Benedict XVI, on the other hand, appears to be less wedded to Thomism. According to Tracey Rowland, at the Second Vatican Council 'he was representative of a younger generation of scholars who were frustrated by what they called the Roman School of Theology, a form of Neo-Scholasticism which did not allow much room for the use of conceptual frameworks built on other than scholastic categories'.<sup>24</sup> He worked with Rahner at the Council and appeared to show impatience with the objections raised by some bishops to ecumenical relations. It is rumoured that he was even suspected in some quarters of presenting a kind of danger or threat to proceedings. However, the student unrest of the late 1960s, post - Council, seemed to be a turning point for him and his shock at events has been attributed by many as the cause of his increasing conservatism. Hence, there is a possibility that a retrospective airbrush has been applied to some of his more avant-garde and youthful positioning at the Council.

### **Developments outside Europe**

And what of other voices outside Europe, especially those in the United States, home to many Catholics with ever-increasing influence? Chapter Five considers the works

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<sup>24</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.2.

Maritain wrote in America. At this point in the thesis it is relevant to consider the position of Catholicism there in the crucial years of the mid-twentieth century, a time when Maritain was actually resident, to present a complete picture of potential influences on him.

Throughout the 1950s a deep root of conservatism in the face of the communist threat could be seen, demonstrated by figures such as Father Leonard Feeney (excommunicated by the Catholic Church for preaching what became known as the 'Boston Heresy', that is, the pronouncement that those outside full communion with the Catholic Church, especially Jews, would be condemned to hellfire), and possibly best represented by Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York (sometimes called the 'American Pope'), favourite of Pope Pius XII and an avid supporter of the fervently anti-communist Senator Joseph McCarthy. Scathing of Pope St John XXIII, Spellman sat, nevertheless, on the Council's Board of Presidency and opposed what he considered to be over-liberal reform, including the abolition of the Latin Mass. As a counterbalance to this influence these same reforms were supported strongly by many of Spellman's colleagues, including, at the other end of the spectrum, Cardinal Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis, who is perhaps best known for his determination to end racial segregation in Catholic schools and hospitals even in the face of determined opposition. According to Kerr, the best known American theologian at the Council at that time was Monsignor Fenton, who, like Ritter, opposed the very conservative views of some of his countrymen.<sup>25</sup> However, the man who made perhaps the most prominent American contribution was the Jesuit John Courtney Murray. Like some of his European colleagues, Murray received a Papal teaching ban in the 1950s as a result of his controversial writings on religious freedom. He had been under observation by the

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<sup>25</sup> Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, p.7.



Vatican for some time because, even as early as the 1940s, he had advocated closer relations with other theists and interfaith co-operation in rebuilding the post-war world. Eventually, but only in 1963, he was invited to Rome for the Council. There he was responsible for drafting what was, eventually, to become *Dignitatis Humanae* (although he stated that he was saddened that the final version was watered down from his original). It was this document which perhaps revealed the widest schism and the most heated debate between Europe and the United States, with the American cardinals, on the whole, lobbying for the recognition of freedom of the individual conscience in religious matters, similar to the liberty embedded in the American constitution and that championed by the personalist movement, and many of the Europeans pushing back fiercely. Thus, as well as cracks in relationships between different sub-groups such as Jesuits and Dominicans, there were geographic differences. Maritain, who spent decades in both Europe and America, makes for an interesting commentator on Council business.

### **The build-up to the Second Vatican Council - social factors**

In summary, there were theological challenges from many different quarters to the dominance of conservative, uniform Neo-Thomism, and its position was shaken and undermined as the 1940s and 1950s progressed. In 1959, Pope St John XXIII had announced that the Second Vatican Council would take place (it was finally convened in 1962), introducing it with the word 'aggiornamento', 'a bringing up to date', which would become the watchword of the Council. This widely - cited intention was a two-edged sword as it was responsible for giving rise to many of the different interpretations of what the Council was set up to do: was it merely refreshing dogma for a modern audience or rewriting it altogether? Thus, in the early 1960s, the ranks of the Catholic

Church, which had been pulled together, after a fashion, in the nineteenth century's First Vatican Council under the banner of Neo-Thomism to present a united front against the threats of positivism and other perceived evils, were in a state of considerable disarray. Depending on one's viewpoint, the Council could be seen either as a threat or, as perhaps Pope St John XXIII saw it, the opportunity 'to open a window and let in some fresh air' and the chance for the Church to begin a new dialogue with the world, one which, scarred by two world wars, was a very different place from that of the previous century. Modern times had seen the rise of communism, which presented a fierce opposition and powerful danger to the Church. Scientific discoveries and technological advances continued at huge pace. The advent of ever more consumer goods encouraged materialism and individualism, as less reliance on communal activity and effort was necessary. Rural communities, where custom, practice and peer pressure had ensured high church attendance, were breaking down. The poor were benefitting from enhanced education, and women, who led the way in church attendance, were becoming increasingly emancipated and uninterested. Mass communication through radio and then television meant that less reliance needed to be placed on authority figures, such as the local priest, and in some quarters there lingered suspicions about what role exactly the Catholic Church had played during the Second World War. This undermined further any inclination on the part of the people to maintain an unquestioning obedience to its priests and its teachings. In France, traditionally a stronghold of Catholicism (even despite the best efforts of the state) the Church was becoming increasingly and quickly marginalised (Maurice Larkin states that the French adult regular Mass-going population dropped from over 20% to less than 15% during the

1960s<sup>26</sup> while Robert Gildea comments that the number of priests relative to the population had halved between the opening years of the twentieth century and 1965<sup>27</sup>). This was the France that Maritain was losing touch with throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Thus, during the first half of the 1960s, the Council members had many issues with which to wrestle and significant choices to make about how they might position the Catholic Church in such a world. These issues were intensified still further by the political atmosphere. As Stephen Schloesser reminds us, the Council opened just a few days before the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 and at a time when 'the world had to endure its deepest anxieties'.<sup>28</sup> He states that it is almost impossible to divorce the Council from its historical setting, less than twenty years after the Second World War and the Holocaust and right in the middle of the Cold War, and that any attempt to assess its impact has to be done in reference to the atmosphere in which it operated. This context, continues Schloesser, was a fragmented one, torn apart by troubles (and with a plethora of new consumer goods, individuals were able to escape from it by retreating into the sanctuary of their homes), and yet the Council appeared to insist time and again in its output that people were growing closer together and becoming unified. This concludes Schloesser is mere 'wishful thinking'<sup>29</sup> on the part of the Council, which was driven by its own fears and anxiety. It may also reflect concerns and 'wishful thinking' about its own disarrayed state and that of the Catholic Church in general.

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<sup>26</sup> Maurice Larkin, *France since the Popular Front Government and People 1936-1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.221.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.163.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Schloesser, 'Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II', *Theological Studies*, 67 (2006), 275-319 (p. 276).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.279.

### Key outputs of the Council and its 'Spirit'

On the death of Pope St John XXIII, Pope Paul VI took up the reins of leadership and announced that the Council's work would continue. In his opening address of 1963 he attempted to clarify exactly what the role of the Council was, stressing that it was to renew the Church, to define more closely its nature and the role of its personnel, to seek unity among Christians, to atone for the Church's role in causing separation (points that chime with Schloesser's comment above), and, vitally, to begin a different kind of dialogue with the world. Over the next two years, a number of documents were proposed, discussed, fought over and redrafted. Prominent among these were *Lumen Gentium* (on the constitution of the Church), *Gaudium et Spes* (on the pastoral constitution of the Church in the modern world), *Dignitatis Humanae* (on religious freedom) and *Nostra Aetate* (on relations with other faiths, including the Jews), with these last two documents being among the most bitterly contested, troublesome and controversial of the Council's output. Key points included the pronouncement in *Lumen Gentium* that although the Catholic Church was the only true church, elements of holiness could be found outside it, for example, in those who sought God but were unaware of the Church, in Jews (God's original chosen people), and in Muslims who also worship the God of Abraham. Therefore, the possibility of salvation, even for non-Catholics, was put on the table for discussion for the first time in centuries. This is a theme that Maritain took up in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. *Gaudium et Spes* set out the Church's social policy to safeguard the dignity of the person, as made in the image of God, the common good and the unity of mankind. In specifying this policy, it distinguished between the needs of the individual and the needs of society as a whole, and drew what it saw as the appropriate balance between the two, a balance which had become, in its view, increasingly tilted towards the needs of the individual at the

expense of society (again, this is a theme that Maritain took up in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* when he emphasised the importance of both communal worship and collective social policy). With the balance corrected, there would be reverence for the person, which would rule out collectivist political systems, and yet also respect for society, in which all men must take their place. A clear inheritance from the personalism of the 1930s and 1940s can be seen in this document, which show the hands of (among others) Murray and de Lubac and the influence, through works such as *Humanisme intégral*, of Maritain himself. *Dignitas Humanae* (agreed by the Council only after fierce discussion, and, possibly, not really agreed at all as it continued to cause problems, post - Council, between different factions) built on the idea of the dignity of the person, by declaring that each person was free to seek the truth without coercion from any other person or from the state. Indeed, the state had the duty of protecting the rights of each person, (although the Council did also state that rights came with responsibilities), as part of its mandate to promote the common good. *Nostra Aetate* built on *Lumen Gentium* in picking up the theme of relations between the Catholic Church and other religions, restating respect for Muslims and emphasising the things that Islam and Catholicism have in common. It also linked Catholicism to other 'truths' as found in, say, Buddhism. In summary, it declared tolerance for all men, irrespective of creed, race and colour, as all men are made in God's image. Most significantly, and where, potentially, Maritain's writings on the subject, especially his just published collection *Le Mystère d'Israël et autres essais*, may have touched the minds and hearts of some of the Council attendees, it absolved the Jews of responsibility for the death of Christ and denounced anti-Semitism. Further notes and guidelines have been added during the years since the Council and centres for Catholic-Jewish understanding have been set up, especially in the United States (these initiatives are explored further in Chapter Six). Besides the key

documents, other significant changes were introduced, including translation of the liturgy from Latin into the local language (which some regarded as a divisive rather than a unifying measure), a return to direct scripture reading and Bible study and a greater involvement of the laity.

Knitting all of this together was what became known as the 'Spirit of Vatican II', which meant, loosely, something pervasive that went beyond a literal reading of the documents (Maritain puts forward something similar in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* when he talks about an 'internal fire', and this will be explored further in the next chapter). This vagueness of meaning, which was inspiring at the outset, became, in many ways, the Council's downfall. It allowed some to interpret the 'spirit' as an openness to new ideas and a dialogue with others of different faiths, (Paul VI declared at the end of the Council that the parable of the Good Samaritan had been the Council's spiritual inspiration and Pope Francis has recently clarified that the spirit is in fact the 'Holy Spirit'), but for others it became an invitation to laxity where every Catholic was welcome to believe pretty much what he or she wished. The openness of this 'spirit' to interpretation and the rather hesitant nature of some of the Council's output is explored by Tracey Rowland in her book *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II*, where she examines the background to and impact of *Gaudium et Spes*. The foreword to the work is written by Aidan Nichols who agrees with Rowland's conclusion that the Council did not really engage with modernity at any fundamental level when trying to get to the bottom of what it meant to be a Catholic in the 1960s. Thus it remained 'paralysed or even impotent' and Nichols concludes: '[w]ithout this enquiry, it will resemble a surgeon who, not knowing where to cut, cannot heal'.<sup>30</sup> Rowland herself calls *Gaudium et Spes*

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<sup>30</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.xiii.

‘a compromise document’<sup>31</sup> with no ‘overarching theological framework in which the contrasts can be reconciled’ leading to ‘a riot of interpretations, especially by those plain persons who lacked a training in theology and philosophy’.<sup>32</sup> She goes on to claim that the document was actually an attempt by some to marry Thomism and liberalism, in order to present the Catholic Church as more in tune with the modern world. One of the names she cites is that of Maritain, who, she says, had tried already to do this in his work on the Declaration of Human Rights (she also quotes Cardinal Garrone, an attendee of the Council and friend of Maritain and Cardinal Journet, who commented that *Gaudium et Spes* was heavily influenced by *Humanisme intégral*). However, there is an irony, she says, as liberalism, which had surged forth on a tide of optimism in 1960, bolstered by the election of President Kennedy, was in its final days as the Council drew to a close, mortally wounded by American involvement in Vietnam and finally laid to rest by the social and political unrest of 1968. Thus, if the Council really was trying to synthesise Thomism and liberalism, it was too slow in doing so and was wrong-footed, already lagging behind the times of events in the modern world when *Gaudium et Spes* emerged, and running to catch up. It feels sometimes that this image could apply to Maritain himself at some points in his life.

### **Maritain’s general influence on the Second Vatican Council**

Thus, the Second Vatican Council did not achieve closure on key issues. This left the field open for personal interpretation, passionate debate and strife for the rest of the 1960s and beyond. It is into this context that Maritain launched the hand grenade that was *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. Paul VI attempted on several occasions post-Council to clarify the Church’s position amidst the confusion, most notably in his ‘Credo of the People of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.18.

God', delivered on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1968, the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul (Maritain's own role in this, which was critical, is explained shortly). Even before the Council closed, there had been talk of the Pope needing to give some kind of 'symbol' of faith, and as the extent of the unrest and muddle emerging in the Council's wake became ever more apparent, the need for this symbol became ever more urgent.

So, looking back more than half a century later, what was Maritain's influence on the Council and its output, if any? Received wisdom, borne out by reactions to *Le Paysan de la Garonne* (and examined in both Chapters Two and Six), is that Maritain, despite his physical absence from the Council, did indeed have a significant spiritual influence. Certainly, some of the Council's output reflects themes that he had been exploring for decades, but this, of course, could be mere coincidence or serendipity. However, Maritain's friendships with some of the Council's key figures are indisputable, and it would not be stretching the boundaries of credibility too far if one assumed that these individuals discussed Council business with him. Maritain was especially close to Journet, with whom he had founded the journal, *Nova et Vetera* in 1926, almost four decades before the Council convened. Although Journet, newly elected as Cardinal, attended only the last session of the Council in 1965, he had a strong influence on discussions. Perhaps even more significant is Maritain's well-known friendship with Paul VI himself, forged during Maritain's posting to Rome in the late 1940s. The depth of their friendship is shown in an alleged episode from the 1950s (referenced earlier in this chapter) when, it is rumoured, Maritain came close to receiving a ban from Pius XII for 'extreme naturalism' and was saved only by the intervention of the future Pope. Tellingly, it was Maritain who was honoured by Paul VI, on behalf of the world's intellectuals, at the close of the Council. Congar, in the televised interview of 1967, commented on the depth of friendship between the two men and attributed this to the



Pope's love of *Humanisme intégral* (interestingly not, therefore, necessarily to a shared theological viewpoint).

Over their lifetimes, Maritain and Journet exchanged some two thousand letters. Those that were written at the close of the Council and during its immediate aftermath, reveal the level of influence that both men actually had on Paul VI. For example, Maritain had a day-long meeting about Council business with the Pope's personal secretary during the Christmas period of 1964. Three weeks later, Journet, despite his protestations but egged on (and almost bullied, if one reads the letters) by Maritain, was made a Cardinal and entitled to participate actively in Council business. The short timescale between these two events is intriguing and one wonders how hard Maritain pushed the appointment at Christmas so that he had his close ally involved intimately in the Council's work. Maritain and Journet had much in common. Both talked about the 'poor Pope', who they saw as trying to do his best in an almost impossible situation. Both bemoaned many of the changes to the presentation of the Liturgy, such as the priest facing the congregation and the reduction of 'sacred' language into 'banal', everyday parlance, even though Maritain appeared to have forgotten that he was part of the lay team who was consulted on the wording of the French Mass (for example, they mourn the dropping of the word 'consubstantial' from the Liturgy, as an example of what some might call nowadays 'dumbing down' (COVI 238). Interestingly, under Benedict XVI, the Liturgy was revised in 2011, and this word, along with many other previously rejected 'difficult' words and phrases, was re-introduced). Their correspondence extends to a discussion of the writing and editing of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, which will be examined more closely in the next chapter, and the genesis of the Pope's Credo. Apparently, according to Cardinal Cottier, who was a disciple of Journet and who accompanied him to the Council as an adviser, it was Maritain himself

who suggested the promulgation of a Credo based on the pronouncements of the Council of Nicea. Journet was then commissioned by Paul VI to draft it (the Pope had considered doing something along similar lines two years previously and had asked Congar for help but had been unhappy with the results). Due to the 'delicate' nature of the task, Journet informed the Pope that he had asked for Maritain's assistance. In fact, in January 1968, Maritain took it upon himself to write the whole draft and send the results to Journet, who sent it without edit to the Pope, who then, in turn, delivered it with very little pruning later that year. The text focused on making the Pope's profession of faith, which was to show the integrity of the faith of the Church, as simple as possible and couched only in terms that would be meaningful to the lay person, thus helping them to resolve the confusion around them. According to Gianni Vilante, in his interview with Cardinal Cottier published in *30 Days* in 2008, Maritain's reaction to the generally warm reception to the Credo was to give thanks to God 'for the heavenly assistance of his wife', claiming that Raïssa had steered him through the project.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the context for *Le Paysan de la Garonne* through a focus on two key aspects. Firstly, it has considered Maritain's metaphysics, theology and philosophy which, once he converted to Thomistic Catholicism, changed little through the years and, as Chapter Two will show in more detail, are reflected strongly in the work. Secondly, the chapter has explored the journey made by the Catholic Church in the lead-up to the Second Vatican Council. In addition, preliminary judgements about the weight of Maritain's influence on the Council have been reached. On balance, it

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<sup>33</sup> Cottier, Georges, 'Paul VI, Maritain and the faith of the Apostles' in *30 DAYS*, issue 4, 2008 [http://www.30giorni.it/articoli\\_id\\_17898\\_l3.htm](http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_17898_l3.htm) [accessed 23 April 2014].

would appear that, through the body of his work and his personal connections, Maritain did indeed have an influence on both the Council's output and also on the attempts to clarify confusion in the period after the Council. However, one point that emerges without question is that it is Maritain's work on social and political issues (for example, *Humanisme intégral*) which were likely to have influenced the Council, not his writings on Thomistic metaphysics (although his theology became more influential afterwards, in, for example, the Credo). These themes will be explored further in Chapter Six, when his legacy is assessed, especially its relevance to the papacy of Pope Francis, who has indicated that the work of the Council has not yet finished. Furthermore, one of Pope Francis's closest officials, the Vatican Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, gave recently a clear indication of which of Maritain's works were considered relevant, listing *Humanisme intégral*, *Christianisme et démocratie*, *Les droits de l'homme* and *Man and the State*, commenting: '[as] you know, all these works contributed to the preparation of the Second Vatican Council'.<sup>34</sup> There was no mention of Thomism, Neo or otherwise, nor of any other branch of philosophy.

However, setting aside any influence he may or may not have had, the general perception in the mid 1960s, rightly or wrongly, was that Maritain, through *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, had criticised the very changes in the Catholic Church that he had helped to bring about. Yet the idea that he would attack his perceived achievement so soon after the event seems somewhat incredible, with its implication of self-sabotage (although

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<sup>34</sup> Iacopo Scaramuzzi, 'Parolin confirms Francis will visit Israel and calls for dialogue in Ukraine' in *Vatican Insider*, March 2014 <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/parolin-32569/> [accessed 23 April 2014].

there are other examples of this perversity in Maritain's life, so it may not be so totally out of character). This apparently odd situation presents many questions for resolution: for example, what was Maritain's purpose in writing the book? Was he frustrated that his theological and philosophical Thomism was not as influential as his work on social issues? Had his audience forgotten about his 'virulent' Thomism and remembered only his social message so that he felt a need to remind them? Was his message in the book misunderstood? Or was it, perhaps, the nature of the changes introduced by the Council themselves that was misinterpreted by Maritain's critics and which he felt he must defend? The next chapter examines the evidence of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* itself, looks at the degree of consistency of ideas between this book and earlier texts by Maritain and begins to answer these questions.

## Chapter Two : *Le Paysan de la Garonne* as Maritain's testament

### Introduction

In 1966, just months after the honour of receiving a special message from Pope Paul VI on behalf of the world's intellectuals, Maritain unleashed *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. In this examination of post-Second Vatican Council Catholicism, styling himself as a 'peasant', a plain-speaking character who says exactly what he thinks even if he knows it means being considered as 'un homme qui met les pieds dans le plat' (PG avant-propos), he defined for Catholic clergy and laity what, to him, was the essential nature of the Church: one that was fixed and constant. He took the opportunity to clarify what he saw as the objectives of the Council, speaking at length about the behaviours expected of the laity, its potential contribution to the Catholic Church, and the difficulties involved in translating individual Catholic virtue into a coherent political and social system. He focused on what for him was a fundamental distinction - that between the temporal world and the Kingdom of God - and he castigated modern society for being in thrall to the former and 'à genoux devant le monde' (PG 85). He criticised what he saw as obsession with the new and the modern, an error which, he believed, had led to the abandonment of valid eternal truths. He called for a clearer distinction between theology and philosophy and attacked philosophies which had been in vogue from the time of Descartes onwards. Finally, he discussed the relationship of non-Christians and non-Catholic Christian denominations to the Catholic Church and prescribed how Catholics should relate to these non-Catholics. In short, he addressed many aspects of Catholicism comprehensively and presented his views with great directness.

The stunned reaction to the book arose from a number of causes, not least from general astonishment that he was attacking the very reforms that he had been credited with influencing. For example, Thomas Molnar lamented in 1967 that 'it is almost tragic to see Maritain now condemning the plants for which he had planted some of the seeds'.<sup>1</sup> At a time when the Church was desperately attempting to refocus in a rapidly changing society, which saw it as increasingly irrelevant, Maritain's book was seen by many, at best, as unhelpful and irritatingly inconvenient. After all, Paul VI had called him his teacher and had translated one of his books into Italian, and one might begin to imagine the scale of his disappointment in Maritain. Yet evidence from the correspondence between Maritain and Journet suggests that the Pope was secretly rather pleased with the book, apparently speaking warmly about it to Journet and others on a number of occasions although not directly to Maritain or in any open way (COVI, p. 392 and others). Aside from the Pope's own (not publically expressed) view, there was widespread speculation that, at eighty-four years of age, Maritain had lost his way. Those who saw him as a man of the 'left' were disappointed at his attack on a widely-acknowledged progressive set of Church reforms and saw the book as a return to his younger days on the fringes of the right-wing Action Française. Those who hoped he might, after many decades, have returned to the 'right' were frustrated by his firm endorsement of the Council's reforms in the opening chapter of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. Reactions were more intensified still because of the tone of the book, which, irrespective of political persuasion, was deemed generally to be bitter and sarcastic. Thus, few readers found much to please them. To give Maritain credit, he himself knew the book was unlikely to smooth troubled waters, confessing to Journet: 'je ne crois pas que le Paysan apporte de l'aide au pauvre Pape' (COVI 259).

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<sup>1</sup> Molnar, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', p.371.

The caustic tone of the work and Maritain's simplistic and sometimes savage dismissals of modern philosophers (for example, he disposes of Sartre in a single sentence) along with his reluctance to balance criticism with any acknowledgment of achievement, are, indeed, far removed from much of his earlier work. The sternness of the tone seems to belong, perhaps deliberately, to an earlier, more dictatorial age than that of the progressive 1960s. Abbé Bars, a close friend of Maritain's, commented that Maritain knew that he would be seen as arrogant, but was prepared to pay this price to get his points across.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, far from being an old man who had lost his powers, as many saw him, when writing the work Maritain appears highly calculating (although also rather misguided). He admitted that he had tried hard to adopt at least the tone of humility (although perhaps not humility itself) in order to give his views more chance of impact: 'Il m'a fallu trouver un *ton* d'humilité. Sans ce ton-là, et les plaisanteries, et l'allure d'un livre *de circonstance*, ce livre serait tout à fait intolérable' (Maritain's italics, COVI 207). Journet, however, commented more than once in their correspondence that Maritain might want to consider softening his tone still further, as his constant little 'digs' were aimed at people his general readership might not even know and were individuals who would no doubt fade into obscurity five years hence. Therefore, readers would not understand the point and might become confused and distracted from more important matters (for example, Journet pleads to Maritain: 'plus vous supprimerez les petites piques [...] mieux ce sera' (COVI 179)). These 'digs', Journet continued, had other implications. He commented that Maritain's campaign against Teilhard de Chardin in the book was part of the reason that the Pope did not praise it openly nor speak to Maritain directly about it: '[c]'est sûrement à cause de Teilhard que le pape ne vous a parlé du *Paysan*, car cela l'aurait mis en opposition directe avec le Général des Jésuites' (COVI

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Bars, 'A propos du «Paysan de la Garonne»', *Revue Thomiste*, 66, (1968), 89-100 (p.97).

324). Despite the serious consequences of Jesuit hostility and a silent Pope Maritain took no notice, and even when Journet attempted to tease him about the tone a few years after publication of the work, Maritain did not appear to share the joke. The relentless criticism and the rambling, repetitive narrative, which was also intentional, as Maritain himself had said that the book was a series of outspoken and blunt personal reflections rather than a coherent narrative (PG 23), did rather backfire and indeed lose some of his points for readers, muddying the clarity of familiar themes, which had featured in previous well-received work.

In particular, the tension between his liberal approach to the rights of the person and his non-negotiable attitude in matters of religious dogma was something with which his readers were already familiar; or, at least, Maritain believed that they were familiar with this apparent ambiguity. Speaking in 1967, he compared the book directly with his 1936 work, *Humanisme intégral*, which had been credited with bringing many left-leaning Catholics to his side at that time, maintaining that the principles of both books were consistent. Only the context, he felt, had changed: 'C'est une stupidité et une calomnie : je tiens plus que jamais à toutes les positions d'*Humanisme intégral*, c'est de la crise actuellement subie par l'intelligence et par la foi que je m'occupe dans *le Paysan* (crise beaucoup plus grave que bien des clercs ne veulent le voir)'.<sup>3</sup> Maritain made a telling choice in comparing these two particular works. Both came into being against dramatic social and political backdrops. 1936 saw the election in France of the left-wing coalition, the Popular Front, while 1966, only a few short years after the violence leading to Algerian independence, saw the stirrings of massive social disquiet, described by Kristen Ross as bringing 'all the problems and dissatisfactions surrounding the French lurch into modernization to the light of day' resulting, ultimately, in the

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Maritain quoted in 'A propos du «Paysan de la Garonne»' (1968), p.90.



student protests of 1968.<sup>4</sup> Thus Maritain's comparison of the books established *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in a political and social context as well as in a religious setting. Echoing Maritain's statement, Bars commented that while *Humanisme intégral* had indeed been provoked by the difficult practical issues faced by Catholics in the 1930s, Maritain's intention at that time had been to provide the underpinning intellectual tools with which Catholics could solve not only these specific problems, but also future challenges (the subtitle of the book, 'Problèmes Temporels et Spirituels d'une Nouvelle Chrétienté', illustrates both aspects). Thus, he claimed, Maritain was re-presenting, in a different context, the very same tools in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in order to make them available to help with the problems of the 1960s. Speaking of Maritain in 1968, Bars said: 'l'essentiel pour lui, en tant que philosophe, c'est de fonder en raison, et sur des fondements inébranlables, les positions pratiques qu'il fait siennes [...] il entre inévitablement dans ses vues une part d'opinion personnelle [...] mais qui doit être équilibrée par une rigueur rationnelle accrue'.<sup>5</sup> However, the problems of the 1960s could be contemplated through prisms, and undoubtedly addressed by means other than the philosophy detailed in Maritain's *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. To cite just two prominent examples, the popularity of structuralism was peaking and competing for favour with emerging theories of deconstruction. Jacques Derrida had been teaching philosophy at the Sorbonne and then at the Ecole normale supérieure since 1960, and in 1966, now attracting the attention of international audiences, was about to publish his first book. Thus, the concept of one absolute truth and of the stability and meaning of words and concepts such as 'being' was becoming ever more distant as apparent contradictions and oppositions were exposed.

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<sup>4</sup> Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1995), p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Bars, 'A propos du «Paysan de la Garonne»', p.91.

So it would appear that it was indeed not Maritain who had changed but the context, and it was Maritain's presentation of modern issues and of the solutions with which he proposed to address them that did not find favour with readers. Of course, there were exceptions to this general attitude. Molnar, despite his sadness at Maritain's attack on the Council's output, stated that Maritain 'solves problems which, in today's light, appear insurmountable'.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen Maritain's influence in France had declined considerably in the decades before publication of the book partly as a result of the many years he had spent out of the country. The stylistic challenges of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* made it difficult and even impenetrable at times, but were not the only reasons for the demise of Maritain's influence. More significant was the waning influence of Thomism in a world that had a much greater focus on subjectivity and which downgraded the importance of collective values. This, in turn, was reflected in and contributed to the increasing fragmentation of society. In describing the two decades before the unrest of 1968, the same period that preceded the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, Ross describes the French 'movement inwards', which on a personal, everyday level meant reaping the material rewards of the 'thirty glorious years' of post-war French prosperity and 'the withdrawal of the new middle classes to their newly comfortable domestic interiors [...] to the enclosure of private automobiles [...] to depoliticization [...]'.<sup>7</sup>

### **Why did Maritain write *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and what did he hope to achieve?**

Maritain made it clear that he wrote *Le Paysan de la Garonne* for Christians, especially Catholics: 'dans ce livre (mon dernier, j'espère bien) je parle à des chrétiens' (PG 110). He did not exclude himself, as much of the book was concerned with what 'we' need to

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<sup>6</sup> Molnar, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', p.368.

<sup>7</sup> Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p.11.

do. Non-Christians were not addressed directly. Although he cast himself in the role of the peasant, the person who could say the things that others dared not, Maritain maintained, somewhat disingenuously, that he did not want to be viewed as a person of authority: 'Ce qui me vexe dans l'aventure, c'est que je risque d'avoir l'air de m'être pris au sérieux, voire de m'être imaginé capable, bonnet en tête, d'apprendre quelque chose à quelqu'un. Je ne me suis pas pris au sérieux, c'est mon sujet qui était sérieux' (PG 282). However, the harsh tone of the book and its numerous attacks on a range of religious figures and philosophers rather suggest the opposite. Maritain certainly supported the Council's work in principle, as evidenced in the book's opening chapter, but the rest of the work revealed his frustration at the interpretation of the work by the Catholic community. Therefore, despite his coy protestations, Maritain did indeed intend the book to give a forceful steer to Catholic clergy and laity. His unhappiness may have been exacerbated, as indicated in a letter to Julien Green,<sup>8</sup> by the Council's watering-down of proposals to reduce the Church's more anti-semitic customs and prayers (a theme that will be explored further in Chapter Six). In the same letter Maritain expressed his disappointment that on his ground-breaking visit to Jerusalem Paul VI chose not to place candles at the Holocaust memorial personally but delegated this task to one of his Cardinals. In his book, *Passion of Israel*, Richard Crane highlights what he calls Maritain's 'Catholic philosemitism'.<sup>9</sup> Maritain's belief that the Second Vatican Council was not radical enough in the area of Catholic-Jewish relations was confirmed when he drafted the Credo for Paul VI in 1968. The Pope used the script almost unedited but made one significant change; a toning down of Maritain's singling out of Jews and Muslims for praise because of their common witness to the one God. Galling though this may have

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p.225.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Crane, *Passion of Israel, Jacques Maritain, Catholic Conscience and the Holocaust* (Scranton and London: University of Scranton Press, 2010), p.3.

been to Maritain, it perhaps reflected the Pope's attachment to diplomacy. Sometimes called the 'pilgrim Pope', Paul VI had travelled extensively (including the historic trip to the Holy Land in 1964, which had been the subject of Maritain's criticism) and, in line with the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes*, attempted to maintain dialogue with all nations and peoples, favouring no one over any other, a feat that was scarcely easy during the process and aftermath of decolonisation, the Cold War and tensions in the Middle East.

A more general dissatisfaction with the Church's activities and, especially and more particularly, with the reactions to these activities from the rank and file of the faithful, appeared to have been brewing for some time before the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. Maritain might be viewed as a spokesperson for a group of disaffected 'old-school' Catholic intellectuals who regarded the Church in the 1960s as being in some kind of serious trouble. Much of this unhappiness and grumbling dissatisfaction was discussed only behind closed doors possibly out of sympathy for the Pope and loyalty to the Church (this tone is captured clearly in the correspondence between Journet and Maritain). Alternatively, such covertness might be indicative of the great reluctance of the group to be seen in any way as anti-democratic. A key person in this circle was Maritain's contemporary François Mauriac, who had written to Maritain in 1965 to ask if they could meet to discuss what they felt they might be able to express openly about this present 'crisis' in the Church.<sup>10</sup> At a meeting of the Académie Française in 1966, Mauriac said of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* that he drank it like 'milk'.<sup>11</sup> Gilson also appeared to view the book favourably, praising it for its stand against the spiritual disarray of the 1960s, and Maritain's fellow Catholic convert Green was a

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<sup>10</sup> Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals*, p.225.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227.

supporter, writing to Maritain that it was essential for someone to have raised their voice to defend the faith, when it was under such heavy attack.<sup>12</sup>

On a more personal note, Maritain may have been motivated by a desire to reposition his body of work, fully aware that in calling *Le Paysan de la Garonne* his testament, it was likely to be interpreted generally as his definitive work and thus gain attention. In the book he attempted to reframe his past works for a 1960s audience, so that the reader saw these through his eyes, giving a double loop of perspective. Perhaps Maritain wished to re-root himself in the public consciousness, as many of the younger generation in France had grown up without him. If Maritain did feel himself to be an irrelevance, this might explain his frequent attacks on what he perceived as the modern tendency to dispense with that which has passed its time and outlived its usefulness. It may also account for some of his bitter tone. Certainly, Journet appeared to share his worry about becoming irrelevant, as demonstrated when he commented that his and Maritain's output might be considered 'dépassé' after the pronouncements of the Council. He expressed his fervent hope that *Le Paysan de la Garonne* would change that perception (COVI 170).

If part of Maritain's objective was to regain recognition as a figure of authority in France, and perhaps to reposition his own work and that of some of his same-generation friends and colleagues through *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, then who he quoted, referred to, and aligned himself with was of vital importance. One figure he drew on heavily was, of course, Journet himself, who was a highly influential and very well-respected figure at the Council during its later stages. Besides Journet Maritain quoted Gilson (especially when talking about St Thomas, even though they interpreted his work differently), who

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.228.

was also held in general high esteem. He referred to Mauriac and praised the missionary work of Charles de Foucauld, founder of the Little Brothers of Jesus, the religious order where Maritain spent his final years, and whose progress towards sainthood had already begun. He extended faint praise, finally healing the old wounds of their rift decades earlier, to his former teacher and mentor (and Nobel Prize winner) Bergson, one of the few men on whom he bestowed (finally) the title of 'philosopher', rather than the lesser and rather derogatory title of 'ideosopher'. Hence, although they were all of an older generation, Maritain ensured that he aligned himself with established and well-respected figures.

As a counterbalance, he attacked most 'modern' philosophers, along with then-popular figures such as the Jesuit priest and palaeontologist de Chardin, (who had deviated from accepted Catholic teaching on the Creation by attempting to reconcile it with more recent theories of evolution) and, as a result, left himself open to censure from his readers. In fact, in a letter to Journet, Maritain commented that he considered (misguidedly and unwisely) his philosophical attacks to be the centrepiece of the work; 'Je viens de terminer 50 pages qui seront la partie centrale du *Paysan*. Il ne s'agit de rien de moins que de liquider tout l'idéalisme moderne,-et la Phénoménologie,-et le teilhardisme' (COVI 168). One almost gets the feeling he was enjoying his aggressive attack. Alinsky once called Maritain 'Saint Jacques [...] filled with love, humility and compassion',<sup>13</sup> although it is far from certain that this was a description with which Maritain would necessarily agree personally. Certainly, his writing in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* showed a less saintly and a more caustic side. One potentially relevant factor is that most of his earlier work had been read and edited by Raïssa. It is entirely possible

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<sup>13</sup> Bernard Doering (ed.), *The Philosopher and the Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p.4.

that she modified some of his stronger expression. After her death at the end of 1960, Maritain withdrew to a monastery in Toulouse, and apart from some judicious pruning and re-packaging of earlier works (notably *Le Mystère d'Israël* in 1965), *Le Paysan de la Garonne* was the first original work published after his bereavement. Mere speculation it may be, but it is entirely possible that the style of the book might have been different, and his criticism more balanced, had Raïssa been there to edit it or, at least, to help him listen more carefully to comments from Journet. Tellingly, at the book's conclusion, Maritain's loss becomes increasingly apparent. His final words are to dedicate the book entirely to Raïssa, and, after a mounting number of quotations from her work, he steps right back, giving over the close of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* to her text *Le vrai visage de Dieu*. This draws parallels with the opening page of *Le Mystère d'Israël*, which he surrenders in similar fashion to a poem written by her in 1947. Perhaps part of his motivation for writing *Le Paysan de la Garonne* was to do it for her and it might even have been part of his own grieving process and an outlet for his frustration and anger at her death. Maritain's friend Stanislas Fumet, director of the Catholic publishing house Desclée de Brouwer, commented of the last pages: 'On comprend qu'elles aient illuminé le cœur du Paysan, dont Raïssa a surveillé le travail, Jacques Maritain laissant entendre qu'il l'a senti à plusieurs reprises. Cette collaboration n'a pas cessé avec le souffle'.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, Maritain's motivation in writing the book comprised a mixture of very personal objectives besides a strong desire to apply the theology and philosophy which had served him most of his life to the resolution of what he saw as the dilemmas of modern society.

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<sup>14</sup> Stanislas Fumet, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', *La Table Ronde*, No.228 (Jan., 1967), 99-108 (p.108).

### ***Le Paysan de la Garonne*: familiar themes**

Even though *Le Paysan de la Garonne*'s reception was turbulent, the objective reader can, without difficulty, trace familiar themes from earlier works in this, Maritain's fiftieth book, for example, the theme of Catholic-Jewish relations, which is examined more closely in Chapter Three. Underpinning this theme and others and clearly visible in the work was Maritain's belief, first articulated in a letter of 1926, in the necessity of having both 'l'esprit dur et le coeur doux' ('Réponse à Jean Cocteau', p.336). *Le Paysan de la Garonne* gives life to this belief and provides a sharp contrast to what Maritain himself viewed as the hard hearts and feeble minds around him.

From the Dreyfus affair and its build-up, through the divorce of Church and State at the beginning of the twentieth century, across the years of Action Française and on to the election of the Popular Front and beyond, the 'left' had been characterised, in general terms, by anti-clericism and the 'right' by the traditions of the Catholic Church. This distinction was reflected in the 'Catholic writers' of the first decades of the twentieth century. Many supported Action Française and General Franco while others, like Mauriac, took pains to distance themselves from both causes. Viewed superficially, Maritain himself appeared to have moved from one 'side' to the other during the 1920s and 1930s, as he had been on the fringes of Action Française in the 1920s, but had then become identified with more liberal views in the 1930s. However, Michael Kelly describes the situation as being far more complex than this, citing the general period of questioning among Catholic intellectuals following the Papal ban on Action Française and Maritain's renewed emphasis on 'the primacy of Catholic values in political or social action' as contributory factors to what appeared, on the surface, to be a change of



principles.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Kelly comments that the emergence of the Catholic 'left' became possible only because of the withdrawal of Catholics like Maritain from their traditional position on the 'right' (and thus from politics in general) into a 'protected space', where they were able to regroup.<sup>16</sup> Maritain described himself as belonging to neither side, stating that the role of a philosopher was non-political. He made his position clear at the beginning of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, where he referenced his 1935 work, 'Lettre sur l'Indépendance', in which he had stated that the philosopher must be detached from taking a definitive position on either the 'left' or the 'right' (PG 40) and this statement chimes in turn with his 1930 comment about Thomism in *Le Docteur angélique* (quoted in Chapter One). Maritain, elaborating further on his own position, distinguished two different meanings of 'left' and 'right' (PG 39). One he saw as political and the other physiological. In terms of the latter, he diagnosed himself as being on the 'left' (which at the extreme end of this self-defined scale meant that he was 'idealistic and unrealistic'). As temperament was, in his view, hard-wired at birth, all one could do was consciously correct any extremes and attempt to bring these to some point of equilibrium. However, whatever the physiological preference, Maritain did not consider this as necessarily dictating the political position. He believed that this, fluid and without the rigidity of a fixed personality, was dependent instead on the context of time and place; a vitally important point as it provides an alternative explanation to what critics see sometimes as his lack of consistency in political position, which might, in turn, be viewed as opportunism. Thus, Maritain saw himself as sitting in the political middle (PG 40), not, at least in the long run, in order to retreat into neutrality, but rather to forge a productive combination of both 'left' and 'right'; from the best place, as he saw it, to prepare the

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Kelly, 'Catholicism and the Left in twentieth-century France' in *Catholicism, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century France*, Chadwick (ed.), (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p.148.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

way for an authentic and vital Christian political activity. Kelly stresses this fluidity when he describes how Maritain's work gave Catholic social and political teaching a flexible underpinning which enabled it to move towards the 'left' when faced with the upheavals of the 1930s and then with world war.<sup>17</sup> By once more referencing 'Lettre sur l'Indépendence' thirty years later in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, Maritain set out his political stall as fundamentally unchanged. However, he did concede that the practicalities of arriving at a formal social and political structure in the 1960s, compared with the 1930s, were just too difficult, adding that a further layer of complexity had arisen as a result of the religious overtones that the words 'left' and 'right' had once again assumed. In his view only two people, Alinsky being one had managed to achieve anything concrete in this area (PG 41).

Yet despite these practical challenges, Maritain's ideal of 'l'esprit dur et le coeur doux' emerged unscathed. He had become close to Cocteau in the 1920s and was instrumental in the latter's short-lived return to Catholicism. When writing to Cocteau he stated that charity and love had to be extended to one's fellow man, even if this led to an 'affreuse compassion' that tore at the heart ('Réponse à Jean Cocteau', p.339). However, he stressed that these tender feelings for one's fellow man were of little value if they were not supported and nourished by a rigorous philosophical discipline, which he saw, of course, as being provided by St Thomas. Therefore, Maritain viewed these two apparent opposites of fraternal love and disciplined philosophy as providing a necessary counter-balance one to another. As a potential advocate of Thomistic personalism (as some see him) this positioning provides a useful bridge which connects the strict observance of Maritain's Thomism to his liberal social and political views, which in turn value and show respect to every individual. However, the bridge might

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.149.

become somewhat slippery, if one were tempted too far by the analogy to place Maritain in a fused middle position, when in actuality he was able, simultaneously, to hold true to two very different standpoints.

This creative tension is as evident in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* as it was in previous work (even if the caustic tone of the book might lead the reader to conclude that there was rather more of the 'hard head' at work). It is particularly apparent when Maritain talks about the role of the Catholic lay-person, whom he sees as having both a temporal mission (as a labourer of the world), and a spiritual mission. Charitable and humanitarian works must not be viewed as ends in themselves he says (PG 88) but must be performed against a backdrop of philosophical speculation, prayer, evangelical fervour and a search for the truth. And in order to find such a backdrop, the lay person needs to set aside time for contemplation and the study of philosophy (such that serving the Church is not seen merely as a social activity), and to speak out fearlessly in pursuit of the truth, even if this causes offence. Charles Boyer, writing in 1967, claimed that Maritain had succeeded in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in uniting in himself not two but three distinctly different men, borrowing one of Maritain's best-known principles from *Les Degrés du Savoir*, 'Distinguer pour unir', to illustrate this: 'un Maritain intransigent, ami passionné et intransigent de la vérité ; un Maritain défenseur de la liberté, de la démocratie et de la justice sociale ; un Maritain mystique, assoiffé de contemplation'.<sup>18</sup>

Essentially, Maritain took an uncompromising stance on what he saw as his defence of the underpinning dogma and truth of the Catholic Church, whilst at the same time he advocated the extension of understanding and charity to one's fellow man. One of his recurring laments in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* was that Catholics had chosen

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Boyer, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne de Jacques Maritain', *Doctor Communis*, Vol. 20 (1967), 33-42 (p.41).

(perhaps wilfully) to misinterpret the Council's reforms as a loosening of essential dogma, when, in fact, the intention was merely to reposition this dogma in the modern world. Therefore, while Catholics were at full liberty to discuss differences in beliefs in a courteous and respectful manner with non-Catholics and non-Christians, and, significantly, to agree on practical humanitarian action ('le coeur doux'), they had also, in his view, an absolute and total obligation to defend their beliefs robustly, honestly and with integrity, instead of seeking to dilute them to please others ('l'esprit dur'). Interestingly, this stance appears to have something in common with the approach of recent pontiffs with Pope St John Paul II being a notable example.

When compared with earlier works, Maritain's position on the different roles of theology and philosophy also remained constant in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. He himself referenced *Les Degrés du Savoir* (PG 73) on more than one occasion and the same points he made in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* can be seen in *Primauté du Spirituel* and *Humanisme intégral*, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. Maritain's realist philosophy was given form for the Catholic Church by scholasticism, a blend of Greek philosophy and medieval Christian belief, with an emphasis on the importance of reasoning to explain apparent contradictions and with its champion St Thomas, described memorably by Stephen Schloesser in *Jazz Age Catholicism* as 'the master synthesizer of Biblical faith and scientific reason'.<sup>19</sup> In both *Sept leçons* and *Les Degrés du Savoir*, Maritain stated his firm belief that Thomism's 'virtual and flowing' intuition was able to absorb other truths within itself while still keeping intact its essential core. This means that it would be, at one and the same time, unchanged and yet always adapting to context. The output of the Second Vatican Council was, for Maritain, an

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism. Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-33* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) p.28.

important illustration of this principle. Nothing fundamental had changed, even if some of the interface with the current incarnation of the world had had to shift.

Maritain regarded Thomistic philosophy as the rational exterior which protected the inner truth of theology and the instrument to explain the mysteries of faith; as such it was the servant of theology (PG 199). He lamented what he saw as a fundamental modern problem, namely that there was no effort being made to distinguish the theology of St Thomas from his philosophy, which, in turn, had led to superficial and lazy readings and consequent misunderstandings of his work. Put rather over-simply this meant for some traditional Thomists (and phrased succinctly by Boyer) that 'on a cessé de croire à la vérité'.<sup>20</sup> Maritain laid some of the blame for this sorry state of affairs at the feet of the Church, who, he felt, had made a bad error of judgement in foisting St Thomas onto the clergy, without giving the support necessary to gain a full understanding of his complex teachings. As a result, St Thomas's essential philosophy, instead of fulfilling its true role of a support to theology, had been cast aside, leaving eternal truths and faith open to interpretation by any passing philosophical trend or fashion. Ultimately, this resulted in the servant (philosophy) leading the mistress (theology). Maritain saw the problem as beginning with Descartes' separation of the thought process from external reality. As Fumet put it memorably Maritain was 'amoureuse de la vérité',<sup>21</sup> and offered what he saw, positively, as at least the possibility of reaching a definite truth, which could be attained, he felt, even if it was only with an uncertain grasp, if Christians were prepared to work hard at understanding the separate, but intrinsically linked strands of St Thomas's theology and philosophy. In the expression of Cardinal Wright, one of the highest ranking American Catholics of the time, and like

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<sup>20</sup> Boyer, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne de Jacques Maritain', p.37.

<sup>21</sup> Fumet, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', p.99.

Maritain himself, a theological conservative and social liberal: 'he stands out - not only among men in general, but among philosophers-for his passionate dedication to truth, and his conviction that truth can actually be attained-however incompletely - by imperfect men in a baffling world'.<sup>22</sup>

In *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, Maritain wrote extensively of the need for an 'internal fire' (PG 101) which he defined as a change in heart and attitude, and might serve as his interpretation of the spirit of Vatican II. He saw this not only as an adequate substitute for a coherent exterior Christian political and social system, which he recognised as being too difficult to create in the 1960s, but also as the fundamental change that the Council had intended for the Catholic community (PG 100). Maritain was keen to clarify what this internal fire meant for the intellect, citing St Thomas of course, and also, perhaps less positively and uncharitably, expending much energy in his attacks on other philosophers, most of whom he dismissed as mere 'ideosophers', that is individuals who hang onto idealism and refuse to embrace the essential philosophical concept of extra-mental reality. Christians, to Maritain, could be neither idealists nor relativists, but had to strive, to the best of their powers, to understand the knowable, objective reality with whatever, often limited, tools they had at their disposal (PG 134). He dismissed prominent figures ranging from Descartes to Husserl in great haste, rushing to the many pages he dedicated to Teilhard de Chardin who was, for him, a key symbol of both society's fixation with making truth 'fit' modern times and its constant, voracious need for myth and 'false money'. Corrupting still further the state of modern philosophy, was, in his view, the rise of positivism and phenomenology, which had both contributed to the destruction of man's 'pre-philosophy', that instinctive common

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<sup>22</sup> John Wright, "'Vigor in Arduis': Maritain's two most recent books', *The New Scholasticism* Vol. 46 No.1 (Winter, 1972), 86-117 (p.95).

sense, which as we saw in Chapter One, was man's moral compass. Cardinal Wright wrote that he was 'a man passionately in love with the idea and the fact of objectivity, of Being, and full of jealous indignation at those "ideosophies" which seek to dissolve all Being into a flux of Subjectivity and Becoming'.<sup>23</sup> This caustic passion and indignation are certainly given free rein in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*.

This chapter now turns to the exploration of two of Maritain's other best-known books, *Primauté du Spirituel* and *Humanisme intégral*. Each reflects that crucial tension between head and heart, which is such a feature of Maritain's work, but the books examine in detail one side of the equation: head (*Primauté du Spirituel*) and heart (*Humanisme intégral*) (putting Maritain's own comparison of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* to just *Humanisme intégral*, which is perhaps his best-received work, rather in the realm of wishful thinking). An analysis of *Primauté du Spirituel* and *Humanisme intégral* taken necessarily together illuminates the path taken by Maritain over the decades to *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, and demonstrates clearly how little his views had changed over the years. In turn this strengthens the case for a review of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, with its emphasis on both head and heart as Maritain's testament, as he himself claimed it was, and the effectiveness of the work as his testament will be considered later in the chapter.

### ***Primauté du Spirituel- 'l'esprit dur'***

Although Maritain was never actually a member of Action Française, he enjoyed a cordial relationship with Maurras for many years, even sharing with him a legacy from Pierre Villard (who was killed in action during the First World War), and did not appear

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<sup>23</sup> Wright, "'Vigor in Arduis'", p.102.

uncomfortable with the general perception that he was a fringe adherent of Maurras's movement. Indeed, as Brooke Williams Smith writes, Maritain shared the movement's opposition to what he perceived as the dangers of liberalism and modernism, appreciated the fact that it brought in Catholic converts and was happy that it gifted him the approbation of his admired spiritual adviser, Clérissac.<sup>24</sup> However, this all changed in 1926 when Pius XI, afraid that the Church's spiritual purity was being tainted by the Action Française's distinctive blend of religion and politics, issued a Papal condemnation of the movement and decreed that French Catholics were to disassociate themselves from it forthwith. Maurras, an atheist, had himself made no secret of the fact that he put politics above all else and had often declared that he saw religion as nothing but a means to a political end. His politics were of the far right: nationalist, monarchist and with a strong flavour of racism and anti-Semitism. If the support of French Catholics brought him political influence, then, to him, that was all to the good. Unfortunately for them, many of the Catholics who had joined the movement had a moral conviction that they were doing the right thing in making a stand against the increasing laicism of the state and the side-lining of Catholic values. The Pope's decree presented them with a terrible dilemma, which many interpreted as pressure to choose between faith and country because they believed that the Pope's condemnation arose not from the fact that he thought that the movement was political per se, but from his objections to the actual nature of the politics of the party. For Maritain himself, the crisis was somewhat of a rude awakening. John Dunaway maintains, rather implausibly surely, that Maritain was so involved with speculative philosophy up until that point that he was not particularly familiar with all of Maurras's work, having a kind of innocence of their

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<sup>24</sup> Brooke Williams Smith, *Jacques Maritain. Antimodern or Ultramodern?*, (New York: Elsevier, 1976 p.36.



content.<sup>25</sup> In a similar vein, Smith comments that the Pope's condemnation 'pushed him from his ivory tower'<sup>26</sup> and marked the beginning of his involvement with political and social policy. Certainly, Maritain's unqualified support of the Papal decree lost him many friends, and left him vulnerable to criticism from the political 'right' for the rest of his life. This animosity intensified still further in 1939 when Pius XII, in the wake of the Spanish Civil War, repealed the ban on the Action Française.

Why did Maritain turn against long-established friends in such a decisive way and leave himself open to such hostility? How much was down to active opposition to Maurras's policies is far from certain. The most obvious reasons were the necessary obedience that he felt a Catholic owed to the Church, a point he stressed over and again in *Primauté du Spirituel*, and the love that he believed was due to the Pope. There is also, of course, his devotion to St Thomas and his theology of truth and philosophic realism. The extent of Maritain's adherence to these concepts and, more particularly his abhorrence of idealism can be seen in a comment he made about Descartes in only the year before the Papal ban of Action Française: 'j'ai dit que la réforme cartésienne est dans l'histoire de la pensée moderne, le grand péché français'.<sup>27</sup> Philosophy, as a mere tool of interpretation, was to Maritain vastly inferior to the truth itself and he felt the ever present danger that this tool would take precedence over, corrupt and usurp the truth. This anxiety preoccupied him throughout his life, and is very evident in his writings in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, forty years later. Ultimately, Maritain would always support the Vatican as a point of principle, even if this principle was sometimes tempered with fear.

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<sup>25</sup> John Dunaway, *Jacques Maritain* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p.20.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Jacques Maritain. Antimodern or Ultramodern?*, p.38.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Trois Réformateurs Luther-Descartes-Rousseau* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1925), p.123.

*Primauté du Spirituel*<sup>28</sup> is the most substantial of a trio of works Maritain wrote following the Papal condemnation, the others being *Une Opinion sur Charles Maurras* (1926) and *Pourquoi Rome a parlé* (1927). In *Une Opinion sur Charles Maurras*<sup>29</sup> Maritain stated that he felt he had an obligation to speak out (echoed in the subtitle of the pamphlet, *Le Devoir des Catholiques*), even if he upset many people, predating his avowed straight talking in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. However, in the case of *Primauté du Spirituel*, Maritain made efforts to limit any potentially adverse reaction by insisting his objections were not of the knee-jerk variety, but rather that they had arisen only after considerable thought, claiming that he had penned, although somewhat conveniently not published, a document on the same subject the year before. In a further attempt to blunt his barbs he painted a reasonably rosy picture of Maurras himself and declared his ‘admiration’ for him, saying: ‘[s]a grandeur, le ressort profond de son activité, c’est avant tout, selon moi, le sens du *bien commun* de la cité. Un magnifique amour, une passion lucide de ce bien commun, voilà ce qui me frappe d’abord en lui, et me le fait regarder comme un exemplaire de vertu civique’ (his italics, UO 11). Yet, even if Maurras were such a paragon of civil virtue, for Maritain, admirable as this was, it was also, at the same time, irrelevant. Maurras’s views were, said Maritain ‘comme un ensemble de conclusions acquises par voie inductive, et, si je puis ainsi parler, d’*immédiates constatations de la raison*’ (his italics, UO 21). He was to return to this theme in *Primauté du Spirituel*, when he discussed Maurras’s positivistic philosophy. Truth, wrote Maritain, belonged to a different, eternal dimension, and should be kept ‘unsullied’ by the ‘passions’ of the day. This truth, as defined by Thomism, ‘n’est lié à aucun parti, il lui suffit d’être vrai’ (UO 11). As a philosopher, an interpreter of this truth, Maritain

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Primauté du Spirituel* (Paris : Librairie Plon, 1927). Henceforth *Primauté du Spirituel* (PS).

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Une Opinion sur Charles Maurras et le devoir des Catholiques*, (1926), p.11. Henceforth *Une Opinion* (UO).

believed, as we have already seen, that he had to remain independent, to concentrate only on matters of doctrine and to refrain from commenting on political and social matters (something which was, of course, to change in the 1930s). Thus, while it was entirely possible that he admired aspects of Maurras's personality and even some of his actions, any admiration was qualified by Maritain's attachment to the eternal truth and, thus, he could state that it was totally right for the Pope to intervene if this truth was under threat.

In the longer work, *Primauté du Spirituel*, Maritain went further still and set out for Catholics his views on the reasons for and implications of the Pope's decree. In doing so he placed himself even more firmly on the side of the Vatican and distanced himself completely from any accusation of involvement in Action Française. Maritain attempted to put a clear space between himself and the movement in a number of ways. Firstly, although the book was published only one year after the condemnation, he took care to elongate the time scale, talking about the crisis as if it had happened some time ago. Secondly, several times he cited Clérissac; the man who he said had pointed him in the direction of the Action Française in the first place. Maritain presented himself in a rather dubious light at this point, as he appeared to abdicate responsibility for his own actions (a position which his wife Raïssa was also keen to support). He called the third part of the work the most important part, claiming, conveniently, that he preferred to look to the future rather than to the past. This presented him with the opportunity to highlight those aspects of the affair that he wished to feature and to ignore the rest. He went so far as to take pains to remind the reader that he had questioned the movement even before the Pope had pronounced, referring on a number of occasions to the objections he had raised in *Une Opinion* (yet his personal relationship with Maurras was actually still alive and well after that book and only began to cool after the publication of

*Primauté du Spirituel*, which is hardly surprising when Maritain says things of Maurras like: ‘mon affection pour ce coeur indompté me fait sentir tout le tragique de son destin’ (PS 75)). Ultimately, despite his attempt to dress up and disguise his criticism, Maritain laid the blame for trouble squarely at the door of Maurras, who, he felt, had overstepped the mark by attempting to speak to the Pope as an equal and who had then added to the damage by whipping up controversy in the press after the condemnation, choosing to ignore the Pope’s spiritual mission and insisting that he had only a political agenda. But then, said Maritain, what could you expect from ‘un chef incroyant’ (PS 88) when ‘une communauté, comme telle, ne peut jamais davantage que ne peut son chef’ (PS 87).

At the heart of *Primauté du Spirituel*, as suggested by the title of the English translation of the book, is the lesson, given by Christ and captured in St Matthew’s gospel, where he clarified the difference between the obedience that is owed to Caesar (temporal) and that which is owed to God (spiritual). This parable has been interpreted widely as an important illustration of the nature of Christ’s leadership, which was not, as the Jews had hoped, a political fight against the dominance of Roman rule, but a more spiritual ministry. Instead of withholding taxes from the Romans as a political protest, Christ told the people to pay their taxes because the coins bore the likeness of Caesar and, therefore, they belonged to him. Yet, crucially, after giving Caesar his due, the people had to remember always that God was owed a far more important spiritual obedience. In the introduction to *Primauté du Spirituel* Maritain mirrored this duality when he laid out his purpose which was to examine ‘la connexion du spirituel et du temporel, du doctrinal et du politique’ (PS avant-propos). In summary, he dissected the reasons for the Pope’s intervention in the work of Action Française and concluded that it resulted solely from deep concern for the spiritual welfare of French Catholics: it had

nothing to do with political concerns. Both examples present a clear illustration of the distinction between what is owed to earthly powers and what is owed to God. For Maritain, the implications were clear. He believed that man owed every spiritual duty to God but, beyond this, man was at liberty to join any political party he liked, left or right, with the sole caveat that the chosen party must not contravene the spiritual teachings of the Church. For a period from 1926 onwards this, of course, ruled out the Action Française.

Maritain described the differing natures of power in terms of the medieval concept of the 'two swords', one temporal and one spiritual, the latter being the Church's weapon which exists to do God's work. To perform this duty, it sometimes has to cut across the temporal world, never to gain worldly power, but '*en raison du péché à dénoncer ou à éviter, du bien des âmes à conserver, de la liberté de l'Eglise à maintenir*' (Maritain's italics, PS 23). In fact, the Church should not and must not get involved in the temporal world: 'il est éminemment souhaitable que les clercs ne s'occupent pas des affaires du siècle, que les curés ne fassent pas de politique au village, que les évêques s'inquiètent peu des vicissitudes gouvernementales [...] ces contaminations du spirituel par le temporel n'ont rien de commun avec le droit du spirituel sur le temporel en raison du péché à éviter, et sont même tout le contraire' (PS 37). If Church members have to involve themselves in order to protect the spiritual, only then the Church 'peut casser et annuler des lois promulguées par un Etat' (PS 32). Logically then, love of the Church, a spiritual matter, must always take precedence over love of country. Thus, viewing the matter superficially French Catholics were right to fear that the Pope was asking them to make a choice. However, countered Maritain, the faithful should not be worried that God would actually ask them to choose: 'Un tel sacrifice n'a jamais été imposé' (PS 62). There is one significant exception: the Jewish people who were asked to choose, and

who chose wrongly ‘en se perdant pour que le monde fût racheté’ (PS 65). This point will be explored further in Chapter Three.

Maritain took the opportunity to criticise Maurras’s positivism, which, he said, showed a disposition towards political naturalism (the application of natural law to politics). Such an accusation identified Maurras squarely as belonging to the ‘temporal’ world. Many Christians, lamented Maritain, had fallen prey to seeing the world, and, even more importantly their faith, naturalistically, and this had tainted the Action Française, giving rise to a destructive brew when it was combined with its gift of ‘une aussi forte et opiniâtre personnalité intellectuelle et morale’ and ‘une forte indocilité’ (PS 95). Just as he insisted forty years later in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, Maritain condemned what he saw as the slavish adoption of passing fashions. He conceded that people had to live in the material world and here they were free to choose whichever political party they wished, ‘*comme membres catholiques de la cité terrestre, non comme membres de la cité catholique*’ (Maritain’s italics) as long as they did this in a moral way with ‘le même désir de servir le Christ et l’Eglise’ (PS 104). In his advice to Catholics on how to move forward from the crisis, Maritain insisted that the Church was always politically neutral (‘*apolitique* ou plutôt *supra-politique*’ (Maritain’s italics, PS 125)), although each individual was free to follow his or her conscience and to locate a desired political party, be it of the ‘left’ or of the ‘right’, even if this meant working with ‘infidels’. The Church had to ‘[se] défendre contre l’agression ses droits et les libertés de ses enfants’ (PS 125), concentrate on the truth, and disregard fashions. Therefore, Maritain was telling the reader that even though it may appear that the Church had often changed direction, this was a misconception on the part of those people who look only to the present: ‘Qui a les yeux collés sur l’instant présent pense à chaque fois

qu'elle change de route: c'est le péril qui change de sens, elle avance en ligne droite' (PS 126).

*Le Paysan de la Garonne* and *Primauté du Spirituel* are separated in time by almost four decades, yet many of the themes are similar and both are underpinned by Maritain's metaphysics (as laid out clearly in *Sept leçons*) which highlights Thomism as the bedrock of theology and philosophy; the focus on an absolute truth which is not diluted by passing fashion; philosophy being subservient to theology yet also helping man to understand faith; the separation of the spiritual from the temporal; the spiritual claiming neither 'right' nor 'left' as a political vehicle; the dual life of the Catholic who has to defend his or her faith, but still live in the world with non-Catholics; and the potential for everyone to become Catholic, irrespective of race. Some of these themes are developed in the later work (for example, there is a greater emphasis on how to live with other people) and some are modified (for example, thankfully, there are no mentions of 'infidels' in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*), but the similarities are striking. This gives further weight to the argument it was not Maritain who had changed by the 1960s, but the world around him that was different. Both books met with hostility. *Primauté du Spirituel* drew scorn from the right-wing Action Française. *Le Paysan de la Garonne* was criticised by many more, this time not only by those right-leaning traditionalists, who would have liked a robust criticism of the work of the Second Vatican Council, but also by left-leaning liberals, who saw the book as out of step with the mood of the 1960s. In summary, the two works form a pair of bookends and each demonstrates Maritain's unswerving view of the unchanging role of the Church: the 'hard head'.

### ***Humanisme intégral* - 'le cœur doux'**

If *Primauté du Spirituel* indeed revealed the 'hard head' of Maritain when the Church was under threat in the 1920s and which re-surfaced in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* during the crisis of the 1960s, the 'soft heart' of Maritain's liberal political and social policy developed in the years between the two works, most notably during the 1930s, with *Humanisme intégral*<sup>30</sup> as the prime example. And as we saw in Chapter One, the Vatican cites this book as a work that influenced the Second Vatican Council. *Humanisme intégral*, based on a series of lectures delivered in 1934 at the summer school of Santander University came into being against the lengthening shadow of the approaching Spanish Civil War. And not only that, but the lectures were written against the backdrop of a turning point in French politics. Maurice Larkin talks of 'the decisive combination of 1936',<sup>31</sup> one which encompassed world-wide economic depression and the threat of the Nazis in Germany, and which in turn engendered fear of the Right in France. This 'combination' led to the election of the Popular Front, France's first, short-lived socialist government.

In the 1936 foreword to the book, Maritain talked of the inspiration of St Thomas (naturally) in its inception, but made a claim for the work that distinguished it clearly from *Primauté du Spirituel*. This book, he said, had its genesis in 'la philosophie pratique' [qui] 'reste philosophie, elle reste une connaissance de mode spéculatif; mais à la différence de la métaphysique et de la philosophie de la nature, elle est ordonnée dès le principe à un objet qui est l'action [...] elle est avant tout une science de la liberté' (HI 6). Thus, after many years spent avowing his aversion to applied philosophy, Maritain

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<sup>30</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral* (Paris : Fernand Aubier, 1936). Henceforth *Humanisme intégral* (HI).

<sup>31</sup> Larkin, *France since the Popular Front*, p.47.



introduced in this work a new dimension for him, one of practical social action and political thought. The reasons for this new direction are unclear yet potentially manifold. They probably include Maritain's natural concern at the course political events were taking. His Sunday seminars and more formal 'Thomist circles' held at Meudon outside Paris, where he had retreated at the beginning of the 1930s, were in full flow at the time. The audience comprised individuals of very different faiths, backgrounds and interests, and the desire to preserve this diversity in the face of encroaching totalitarianism may also have influenced him. Perhaps, it must be added, he was (also) capitalising on a convenient opportunity. Therefore, he could have been following the movement leftwards rather than driving it. Whatever the reason, unlike both *Primaute du Spirituel* and *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, the book caught the mood of 1936 and its general reception was very favourable, even despite the fact that under the overt liberal policies it presented, the same uncompromising religious viewpoint was still faintly etched and visible to those who chose to see it.

One of the key themes of the book is the definition of the term 'humanism' and Maritain compared his vision with more customary interpretations of the word. This method of working was typical of him. Time and again he took a contemporary theme, dissected it to show that its true roots were contained in Thomism and then dismissed other definitions (his treatment of 'existentialism' is another example). Humanism, claimed Maritain, had much in common with personalism which also centred on the concept of the human personality. The common definitions of humanism at that time, he said, concentrated only on the human aspect of the individual and his social and political place in the community of human beings and completely ignored that part of the human personality that reflected God with its 'superhuman' or 'heroic' quality. Maritain accepted the humanity of man yet also insisted that man transcended the

human element as it is his soul which is the dominant part of this integral mix. In this way he distinguished his version of an 'integral' humanism from, in his view, the more common 'bourgeois' humanism that worshipped only the human. In doing so he presaged the image of those 'à genoux devant le monde' in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. In *Humanisme intégral* Maritain placed the blame for the debasement of humanism on a centuries-long process which stretched from the Reformation (when Luther, and, in particular, Calvin with his concept of predestination, introduced the view that man was essentially corrupt), through to Rousseau (who emphasised only the human side of man, claiming his goodness was part of nature), and, finally, on to the atheism of Comte, Hegel and Marx (which viewed man as only a small cog or part of the bigger machine of mankind). If this were not bad enough already, claimed Maritain, this tradition of 'anthropological' humanism had been debased still further by Darwin's theory of evolution and by Freud and his psychology, which both reduced man to a set of mere impulses. Maritain bemoaned the separation of the human from the divine as the 'tragedy of humanism', because man had become the centre of his own very limited world. Capitalism too came in for criticism, not the system itself, which Maritain had no particular issue with, but rather the intrinsic evil of the spirit that underpinned it in its then-incarnation. This reduced man to a mere provider of labour, if he was poor, and to an impersonal provider of capital or a consumer, if he had money. Neither position had enough room to accommodate the whole of the human personality.

While capitalism per se was not Maritain's target, he took considerable time in the book to mount an intense criticism of communism, which, in rejecting what it considered to be the bourgeois, capitalist, calcified Christian world, had made the fundamental error, in his view, of turning its back on Christ too. He was able to find praise for some aspects of communism, like its devotion to action (a sentiment he

repeats in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*). Yet at the heart of Maritain's denouncement of communism, something to which he held firm during his life, even despite the loose alliances of Catholics and communists during the Second World War, was what he believed to be its underpinning motivation: a resentment of God. This fuelled the desire to exact revenge, which, in turn, led to a dismissal of Christianity and a replacement of it with its own form of religion. Christianity, he stated, was lacking in action and needed to evolve organically to fight injustice, instead of remaining static and helpless in the face of human suffering. Thus, what was needed Instead of communism, said Maritain, was evangelisation through the Gospel and a unification of the dualism that saw Church worship as something which co-existed with, but was divorced from, day- to-day secular life in the world. Repeating the theme of *Primauté du Spirituel*, (give to Caesar and to God that which is due to each), he clarified the interrelation of the spiritual and the temporal: 'pour le chrétien, cet ordre spirituel doit vivifier et surélever l'ordre temporel lui-même, ce n'est pas comme faisant partie de lui, c'est au contraire comme le transcendant, comme étant de soi absolument libre de lui et indépendant de lui' (HI 108). The two elements are, therefore, separate and distinct but also synthesised and integrated to give Christianity true vigour.

As is usual, Maritain did not give a detailed description of the form of the political and social structures that would support this energised integrated humanism because he maintained that this was not the task of a philosopher. Therefore, despite his statement of intent he ventured only so far into the territory of practical philosophy before pulling back abruptly. Even so, he did indicate that integrated humanism needed a form that was relevant for that particular society at that specific time (thus bringing to mind his belief that, while religious truths remain constant, the precise temporal form can vary). Therefore, different systems, cultures and civilisations would be valid

depending on circumstance. As such, forms should grow and develop organically and a return to, say, the structures of Middle Ages Christianity would be totally inappropriate. At this point, he took the opportunity to criticise Nazi Germany, three years before the outbreak of the war, for its veneration of past times and dead glories. Maritain called the mix of a constant truth with a current manifestation a 'idéal historique concret', which has 'une essence capable d'existence et appelant l'existence pour un climat historique donné, répondant par suite à un maximum *relatif* [...] de perfection sociale et politique [...]' (his italics, HI 140). At that point in time Maritain saw this ideal as a 'pluralist commonwealth': communal, where people would share their material goods (thus it differed from capitalism) and personalist, with respect for that part of the human being that is 'supra-temporal' (thus it differed from communism). The consequence was that, although Christianity could give the secular world its 'vitality', other faiths needed to be able to live in freedom in a democracy alongside Christians. Maritain returned to this theme in one of the works he wrote from his war exile, the 1943 book, *Christianisme et démocratie*, where, again, he lamented the disconnect between the spiritual and democracy, and called for an evangelical spirit of democracy (embodied on this occasion by America, where he was living at the time), in which men could live in harmony and peace. Individuals would be able to have their own interests, as in a capitalist society (such as that embodied by the United States), but would also extend the hand of friendship to all: 'Le problème n'est pas de supprimer l'intérêt privé, mais de le purifier et de l'anoblir; de le saisir dans des structures sociales ordonnées au bien commun, et aussi (et c'est le point capital), de le transformer intérieurement par le sens de la communion et de l'amitié fraternelle' (HI 201). This would result in : 'une primauté vitale de la qualité sur la quantité, du travail sur l'argent, de l'humain sur le technique, de la sagesse sur la science, du service commun des personnes humaines sur

la convoitise individuelle d'enrichissement indéfini ou la convoitise étatiste de puissance illimitée' (HI 222). To achieve this aim, fascism and communism would have to be eliminated, because both spring from the same positivist source which, in turn, implies a refusal to accept that man comes from God: when interpreted by the 'right', God is obliterated by the degree of positivism's contempt for man, and when interpreted by the 'left', a denial of man's 'nothingness' results in a removal of God in order to divinise man. Key to Maritain's vision of integral humanism was the reengagement of the 'masses' in religion and active participation of the working man in the creation and ownership of his means of economic support (calling to mind Alinsky's work: see Chapter Five). At this point Maritain did, unusually, advance some practical suggestions as to how this might be done. These have a familial structure and, despite his protestations to the contrary, did in fact bear more than a passing resemblance to the guilds of the Middle Ages. However, as expected from the author of 'Lettre sur l'Indépendence', no particular political party was endorsed : 'on trouvera, en fait, des chrétiens dans les formations politiques les plus diverses, parfois les plus contraires, étant supposé que leur conscience n'aura pas jugé qu'adhérer à telle ou telle de ces formations serait coopérer à un mal' (HI 280). Not all Christians would want to participate and yet some non-Christians would; the common key would to be a belief in a rather vaguely defined philosophic spirit. Furthermore, presaging another theme contained in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, it would be the laity who drove things forward in the world, not the clergy.

Maritain himself claimed that there were similarities between *Humanisme intégral* and *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and these are evident to see. Both works placed emphasis on the supremacy of the spiritual, the unchanging nature of truth, the differing roles and interrelation of theology and philosophy (inspired by Thomism), the need to

guard against worship of the temporal world, the role of the Christian in society and dealings with non-Christians. Both works drew on the themes of *Primauté du Spirituel*. If this latter work concentrated almost exclusively on the 'hard head' aspect of Maritain's ideal, *Humanisme intégral*, while showing the 'soft heart' in its concern for how men were to live together in harmony and love, had at its core the same 'hard' bedrock of an uncompromising, unchanging eternal truth. This, in turn, linked all the works to the metaphysics of *Sept leçons*. However, despite Maritain's determination to couple the two works in the 1960s, there are a number of key differences between *Humanisme intégral* and *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. One of the most striking is the abandonment in the later work of any blueprint, however sketchy, for a Christian political and social structure, which had been a feature of the earlier book. Instead, more emphasis is placed in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* on the theme of the 'internal fire' as a force for change, which was a far more muted theme in *Humanisme intégral*. The style and tone of the earlier work is strikingly less abrasive, with many images of integral humanism 'blooming', 'coming to fruition' and 'flourishing' and more subtle and measured criticism of individuals and other movements than is seen in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. However, even with these differences, the continuity of the ideas can be traced with little difficulty, supporting the view that, fundamentally, Maritain's position remained unchanged. The fact that eternal truths could be 'made over' to suit modern needs, something which seemed obvious to him, had, in his view, been forgotten by the faithful of the 1960s or perhaps they had purposefully ignored it as they rushed to push aside essential dogma in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.

### **Conclusion-how successful is *Le Paysan de la Garonne* as Maritain's testament?**

Maritain called *Le Paysan de la Garonne* his testament, and we can see that through its restatement of recurrent themes, references to earlier works (as distilled and refocused by the author), and constant and unwavering philosophical position, it can certainly be considered as a candidate for this honour. The caustic tone of the book is, however, very different from that of most of his previous work, and this dramatic change appears to have got in the way of many of even his keenest readers feeling able to trace the consistent thread of ideas. In this sense, the success of the book as a testament has to be limited. Maritain himself seemed to recognise this, as the book, despite his stated aspiration, was not his last. His final work, *De L'Église du Christ*, (as Journet called it, a 'brother book' to *Le Paysan*, with even a very similar dust jacket) covered much of the same ground, albeit in a less abrasive and confrontational way.

However, even if readers got past the tone of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and were able (and willing) to trace the links and to recognise the similarities to earlier works, the themes that were uncovered were unlikely to go down well in the mid 1960s. The context in which Maritain's work was viewed had changed beyond recognition. The mid 1930s was a time of great anxiety for many with the rise of communism and fascism and the approach of war, and there may have been a greater need for certainty and for answers to pressing problems and fears. This could have accounted in part for the favourable reception of *Humanisme intégral*. In the 1960s, problems, while still serious, brewed instead under the surface, were less pressing and could be forgotten in a day-to-day life which had become more comfortable materially and more independent of macro issues, even that of the terror of the Algerian war, which had been brought to France's own shores. In addition, pushing didactically at people the concept of an

absolute truth when there was a growing emphasis on subjectivity and doing ‘one’s own thing’ made for uncomfortable reading for Catholics of that time. Thomism had already begun its decline into obscurity and disrepute. The Church knew that it had to refocus in such a climate, but the possibly over-optimistic and over-enthusiastic misinterpretation of the Council’s reforms by both clergy and laity made it even more difficult for Maritain to state his case for the non-dilution of essential dogma. However, although his philosophy may have been out of step with the second half of the twentieth century, there is a faint possibility that it may gain more ascendancy in the Catholic Church as it is today. For example, as seen in Chapter One, some of the wording of the pre-Council liturgy made a return to the Mass in 2011.

Complementing this immovable philosophical position is the ‘coeur doux’ of Maritain’s writings on political and social themes, which take their most obvious form in *Humanisme intégral* and in his work on the Declaration of Human Rights, referenced and echoed in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, especially in its extensive guidance on the desired conduct of Catholics towards non-Catholics. Links to this side of Maritain’s expression can be seen in the work of such people as Alinsky, with whom Maritain corresponded from the 1940s until his death, and with whom he appeared to have a father/son relationship (Alinsky even called him his spiritual father). This connection is explored further in Chapter Five.

One area where there has been a particularly great desire to shape Maritain’s reputation has been that of Catholic-Jewish relations. As illustrated by praise for Maritain’s stand against anti-Semitism from the then French president Jacques Chirac at Drancy in 1995, there seems a need in France to position Maritain as a progressive thinker and a role model. But, as his uncompromising views on religious dogma in *Le*



*Paysan de la Garonne* imply, Maritain's position was far less clear-cut than the one he may have been assigned by the hopeful. This will be explored in Chapter Five where the positions of a number of writers will be considered, including those based outside France, who have pointed out that his views, especially on the 'mystery' of Israel and on the notion of the necessity of Jewish suffering, can actually be interpreted as having a tough core of anti-Semitism. This ambiguity might serve as an uncomfortable reminder to France of its past, and has possibly contributed to Maritain's fade into obscurity, forgotten except for the occasional opportunistic revisit, such as that at Drancy.

Thus Maritain has been held up to represent a variety of many different things at different points in history. His broadcasts during the Second World War from exile in America have been enshrined as part France's story of its glorious resistance. He appears through time to have satisfied a number of differing needs, representing what people need him to represent. As Cardinal Wright stated in his article at the time of the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* 'If you choose your topics carefully, you can represent him as agreeing with every sort of extremist who exists in the somewhat argumentative Church of today'.<sup>32</sup> However, although *Le Paysan de la Garonne* may be viewed thematically as Maritain's testament, its tone and presentation make it very difficult for any particular group to claim it as its own and to appropriate Maritain to further an agenda. As the book had few champions, it could be said that it did not succeed where earlier works had and, therefore, despite its theoretical claims as his testament, it has to be viewed as a failure overall. On the other hand, precisely because it is so difficult for any one faction to claim the work as 'theirs', it may be the most successful and representative testament that Maritain, a man of such complexity and contradiction, could have possibly written and bequeathed to the world. The final word

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<sup>32</sup> Wright, "Vigor in Arduis", p.89.

may rest with Molnar who attempted to sum up Maritain's chequered legacy: '[f]or in spite of his great clarity in detail, there is also the strange ambiguity of a man who somehow never could bring into a convincing synthesis his philosophy and his politics'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Molnar, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', p.370.

## Chapter Three: The position of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in Maritain's works on Catholic-Jewish relations

### Introduction

The framework presented by Maritain in *Primauté du Spirituel* and *Humanisme intégral* granted man leave to participate in and contribute to communal life and to help his fellow man, but preserved above everything else his right to follow his conscience and to worship God in the way of his choosing. The two works taken together (with each echoed in later years in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*) present a comprehensive picture of the core underpinning of Maritain's principles: the ideal of 'l'esprit dur et le coeur doux'. Even allowing for a tone that changed over the decades, Maritain's writings on Catholic-Jewish relations (a contentious subject in France since the Dreyfus affair and one which had only grown in intensity as the twentieth century progressed) demonstrate a specific and significant encapsulation of these same principles; one which has attracted considerable attention from religious, political and social figures, igniting praise and controversy in equal measure. To many people, Maritain was a champion of the cause of the Jews at a time when others dared not align themselves with their cause and a lone voice battling against anti-Semitism. In North and South America in particular, he was and is applauded for his liberal and humanitarian views. In France, but only as the country began to come to terms with its war-time activities more than fifty years after the end of the Second World War, Maritain was reclaimed as a hero for his stance against anti-Semitism. Yet to other parties, the 'soft heart', which extended support and friendship to the Jews as people, masked something which to them was altogether more sinister: the 'hard head' which defended a religious dogma that saw the Jewish people

as unfulfilled Christians. And to them this was a form of philosophical anti-Semitism. Thus, Maritain's attitude to the Jews, and especially how this has been interpreted, is complex, shaped not only by the times in which he grew up, but also by his allegiance to Thomism. *Le Paysan de la Garonne* is a good place from which to examine and unpick the different strands. However, before turning to this work, a backdrop to the apparent contradictions can be sketched by examining Maritain's previous writings on the Jews. Indeed, the first sentence of his very first essay on the subject 'A Propos de la «question juive»' sets out clearly the two aspects he felt necessary to consider and which gave rise to the tension between the 'mystery' and the practical problems which he referred to in *Sept leçons*: 'La question présente deux aspects: un aspect politique et social, et un aspect spirituel ou théologique'.<sup>1</sup>

### **Aspect one: political and social considerations**

#### **Early works (the 1920s)**

As we have seen in *Primauté du Spirituel* Maritain asserted that man has never been asked by the Pope to choose between Church and State, except in one case: that of the Jews. He introduced the concept of such a choice in his first essay, which was based on the text of a talk delivered at a gathering of Catholic writers called 'la semaine des écrivains catholiques'. Maritain stressed in this talk and essay that it was necessary for the Jews to choose, on a mutually exclusive basis, between loyalty to Palestine or to the country in which they lived. Maritain distanced himself from this work as the years passed. Significantly, it does not feature in Maritain's definitive chosen statement on this subject, *Le Mystère d'Israël*. Maritain alluded to the exclusion of some works in a

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, 'A Propos de la «question juive»' in *L'impossible antisémitisme* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2003), p.61.

footnote to the collection's preface : 'J'ai, en particulier, supprimé un certain nombre de redites (il en reste encore trop, hélas ; comment faire autrement avec des textes traitant du même sujet et écrits à des moments fort divers, pour des lecteurs ou des auditoires différents?)'.<sup>2</sup>

Besides Maritain's protestations that he was merely removing repetition from the collection, what else was there about this essay that led him to omit it from the collection? Certainly, it presented a Maritain who, in political and social matters, had a long way to travel before he reached his position of maturity. The extent to which he was to change reveals itself in a number of ways. Firstly, as he was to do later in *Primauté du Spirituel*, he discussed the principle of man's membership of two states, the terrestrial and the spiritual, but also raised the additional question of which terrestrial state the Jews belonged to (a debate that did not merit mention later when talking of the French members of the Action Française in *Primauté du Spirituel*). His conclusion, possibly influenced by the atmosphere of post-war regrouping in France at that time, was quite clear. Once the state of 'Palestine' was created, he said (still over a quarter of a century away from his time-point of 1921, but already much discussed, not least due to the efforts of such men as Theodor Herzl, who founded the Zionist Organisation), Jews should either take up residence there and renounce whatever previous nationality they had held, or stay where they were and be under 'l'obligation d'opter [...] pour la nationalité française, anglaise, italienne, etc. - et ceux-ci devront refuser tout lien avec le corps politique juif'.<sup>3</sup> In 1965, such a perspective was, at best, outdated and, at worst, offensive to some of his 'auditoires différents', although not all of them; de Gaulle, for example, at the time of the Six Day war was keen to dissociate himself and France from

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Le Mystère d'Israël et autres essais* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), avant-propos. Henceforth *Le Mystère d'Israël* (LM).

<sup>3</sup> Maritain, 'A Propos de la «question juive»', p.63.

Israel's actions (so worried was he that world peace was under threat), that he made a number of statements about Israel's aggression that might be deemed anti-semitic.

Secondly, Maritain's choice of vocabulary conforms to some classic negative Jewish stereotypes. In the wake of the Dreyfus affair, even though he did not go as far as many of his contemporaries in blaming the Jews alone for the problems of the day, he talked about the need to be vigilant against 'secret' Jewish societies and financial intrigues run by 'carnal' Jews. Maritain presented, side by side, two distillations of the essence of the Jewish people, one 'bad' and one 'good', and as a result came very close to stereotyping. Furthermore, the views he expressed in this essay were not isolated examples. He made similar comments to Cocteau, also in the 1920s, illustrated most clearly when he said : '[s]'il y a toujours les Juifs charnels, il y a aussi les vrais Israélites, *en lesquels il n'est pas de ruse*' (Maritain's italics).<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, and where Léon Bloy's influence can be traced, we see his description of the Jews as revolutionaries, not because of a conscious plan on their part to fulfil such a role, but solely because of their rejection of Christ (Bloy is viewed in some quarters as highly anti-semitic, not least for some of his grotesque physical portraits of the Jews; for example, John Hellman calls him 'one of the most extreme and vociferous anti-Semites of turn-of-the-century France'<sup>5</sup>). A further factor and possibly the one that is most potentially damning, revealed itself when Maritain talked in the essay about the necessity of 'un certain nombre de mesures générales de préservation' to protect public safety from various Jewish practices .<sup>6</sup> Although he himself is vague about the form these should take, he refers his listeners and readers to a study by the well-known anti-Semite, René de la Tour du Pin. His statement contrasts

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<sup>4</sup> Maritain, 'Réponse à Jean Cocteau', p.334.

<sup>5</sup> John Hellman, 'The Jews in the new "Middle Ages": Jacques Maritain's Anti-Semitism in its Times' in *Jacques Maritain and the Jews* ed. by Robert Royal (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp.89-103 (p. 91).

<sup>6</sup> Maritain, 'A Propos de la « question juive »', p. 63.

strongly with that in the postscript to his 1965 collection where he maintained that Jews should have full and equal rights: 'ils doivent l'avoir [l'égalité] réellement et pleinement, non seulement dans la loi, mais dans les mœurs - c'est l'égalité absolue des droits et d'opportunité entre eux et les autres citoyens des Etats dont ils sont membres' (LM 246). Finally, there is his use of the very phrase 'la question juive' in the title of the essay, with its immediate connotations not only of Karl Marx and the Décret Crémieux, but also of Edouard Drumont, founder, in 1889, of the anti-semitic League of France and author of the 1886 book *La France Juive*, which blamed the Jews for all that was wrong in society and called for their exclusion from it.

### **La question juive**

France had been the first European country to emancipate, at least in theory, its Jews, giving them equality as citizens during the French Revolution. But the question of what part the Jews were to play in the political state remained unsettled throughout the nineteenth century, in France as elsewhere. A seminal moment came with Karl Marx's 1843 work *Zur Judenfrage (On the Jewish Question)*, published in Paris in 1844 and then in a French translation in 1850 (but not translated into English until 1926). The book was written as a response to Bruno Bauer's studies on the attempt by Jews to secure a political emancipation in Prussia, similar to that which had been achieved in France. Bauer, as quoted by Marx, had declared that the solution was for the Jews, along with Christians, to renounce their faith so that 'man gives up religion in order to be emancipated *as a citizen*' (Bauer's italics).<sup>7</sup> Marx believed that Bauer had placed too much emphasis on the religious aspect, and not enough on the secular. The crux of the matter for Marx lay in 'the relation between the political state and its presuppositions,

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' in *Karl Marx, Selected Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p.5.

whether the presuppositions be material elements such as private property or spiritual elements such as education and religion, the conflict between *general* and *private interest*, the split between the *political state* and *civil society*' (Marx's italics).<sup>8</sup> He continued: 'the perfected Christian state is not the so-called *Christian* state acknowledging Christianity as its foundation in the state religion and excluding all others. It is, rather, the *atheistic* state, the *democratic* state, the state that relegates religion to the level of other elements of civil society' (his italics).<sup>9</sup> So for Marx the role of religion was just one of a number of battles in the war to secure political emancipation. The Jews did not even feature particularly strongly in the first part of the essay, where Marx concerned himself with a general discussion of the role of religion in society. It was the second part of the essay that attracted particular attention and which led to accusations that Marx was, in fact, anti-semitic. Evidence to support this claim emerged when Marx spoke of the need for the whole of society to rid itself of bargaining, egotism and selfishness and to focus instead on the common good. If that happened, then in his view the features that characterised 'Jewishness' would also disappear. Concentrating on what he called the '*everyday Jew*' (his italics) Marx said:

'What is the secular basis of Judaism? *Practical need, self-interest.*

What is the worldly cult of the Jew? *Bargaining.* What is his worldly god? *Money.*

Very well! Emancipation from *bargaining* and *money*, and thus from practical and real Judaism would be the self-emancipation of our era'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.22.



He added: 'the practical Jewish spirit has become the practical spirit of Christian nations.

The Jews have emancipated themselves insofar as the Christians have become Jews'.<sup>11</sup>

He finished: 'the *social* emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism*' (his italics).<sup>12</sup>

Yet the fate of the Jews was being determined not only by rhetoric and philosophical debate. Despite their declared equality as citizens, French Jews continued to suffer very real and humiliating anti-semitic customs and practice, including the necessity to swear derogatory oaths in courtrooms (for example, the 'More Judaico') which were abolished only in 1846. The removal of such discrimination was due largely to the efforts of the celebrated Jewish lawyer, Adolphe Crémieux, who also campaigned for full rights of citizenship for the Jews of Algeria (resulting in the landmark Décret Crémieux of 1870). Therefore, even though they had equality on paper in reality the Jews of nineteenth century France faced wide-spread anti-Semitism, with its focal point being crude caricature and propaganda in Drumont's newspaper 'La Libre Parole'.

### **Influences on Maritain: anti-Semitism in France**

This was the political climate in which Maritain was born (in 1882) and educated. It continued to be, according to Larkin, deeply anti-semitic: '[a]nti-Semitism had been a significant factor in French politics since the 1880s, when Jews had been made the scapegoats for the economic recession of the late nineteenth century as well as that of the 1930s'.<sup>13</sup> Paxton described the atmosphere in 1940 as being one in which

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>13</sup> Larkin, *France since the Popular Front*, p.99.

‘indigenous French anti-Semitism was free to express its own venom’.<sup>14</sup> According to Paxton, French anti-Semitism was ‘more cultural and national than racial’ because what the French ‘required of outsiders was assimilation, the unreserved adoption of French culture [...] cultural conformity’.<sup>15</sup> This was what the Jews, or at least those who had fled recently to France, did not necessarily provide. This theme is echoed by Maud Mandel. She identifies the centralist, ‘assimilationist’ nature of French government which increased in momentum at the end of the nineteenth century and was reinforced by the operations of the state, including education and military service, until it asserted ‘a universalistic conception of French citizenship that downplayed minority affiliations’.<sup>16</sup> The established practice of regarding religion as a private matter was, she said, tossed to one side by the Vichy government who, for the first time in a century, used religion ‘as a way to institute state-sanctioned oppression’.<sup>17</sup> Andrew Knapp and Vincent Wright present a detailed analysis of French ‘dirigisme’ yet also make clear how much manipulation there was of these rules that were meant to centralise, commenting ‘[t]he rhetoric of the state often conceals a reality of grubby compromises with those very interests on which the state is supposed to keep a stern and watchful eye’.<sup>18</sup> Robert Gildea provides many examples of how the French demonstrated individual acts of anti-Semitism under the Occupation and Vichy government, and sometimes beyond these events, summarising thus: ‘The enthusiasm of the French to squeeze out Jewish partners from company boards, to present themselves as agents for the liquidation and sale of Jewish businesses, and to apply to buy up such businesses seems as good as sign as any

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<sup>14</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p.174.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.175.

<sup>16</sup> Maud Mandel, *Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Knapp and Vincent Wright, *The Government and Politics of France* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p.22.

of the extent of popular anti-Semitism'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, anti-Semitism was not confined to either the 'left' or the 'right'. While the latter faction, usually centralist, Catholic and opposed to change, was distrustful of outsiders, the former often equated Judaism with capitalism in the way that Marx did: for example Gildea comments: '[t]he left-wing critique of Judaism started with usury and identified it with a finance-capitalism that had taken off in the nineteenth century'.<sup>20</sup> Maritain's own childhood background was liberal and his grandfather was Jules Favre, one of the founders of the Third Republic. The Dreyfus affair and its aftermath coincided with his teenage years and he entered university as a 'Dreyfusard', atheist and socialist. Even so, some twenty years later, Maritain felt able and even comfortable to refer his readers to de la Tour du Pin. Although his views were far less extreme than those of some of his contemporaries (for example, he stressed in 'A Propos de la «question juive»' that the Jews were not to be blamed for all the ills in society), it might be unrealistic to expect Maritain to emerge uninfluenced by the times in which he grew up. His own realisation of this fact, and how, even subconsciously, his writings betrayed this environmental conditioning, may have led to his suppression of the 1921 essay in his 1960s collection.

### **Influences on Maritain: significant others**

Maritain converted to Catholicism at the age of twenty-four, an event that was greeted with little enthusiasm by his Protestant family. Henceforth his attitude to Catholic-Jewish relations appeared to have been shaped by encounters with significant others. The first of these was his wife Raïssa, who converted to Catholicism with him, in her case from Judaism. At around the same time as he met Raïssa, Maritain became close friends

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains* (New York: Picador, 2004), p.410.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.305.

with Charles Péguy, with whom he shared a love of France, yet a love which, according to Robert Royal, was not for Péguy 'grounds for a pugnacious nationalism, militarism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism'.<sup>21</sup> Péguy championed the rights of Jews against prejudice and his position was that they were entitled to the same freedoms as all other members of society. Therefore, he saw the Jews as a collection of individuals and was less interested in considering the needs of the Jews as a race. The third key influence on Maritain was Bloy. According to Stephen Schloesser Bloy 'stirred the passions of a younger elite bitterly contemptuous of the received order in both politics and religion'.<sup>22</sup> Bloy did this through his identification with suffering and through a preoccupation with those on the fringes of society, reproaching those who were more comfortable. He called money the blood of the poor and lived in abject poverty himself. Denouncing anti-Semites, he focused on the Jew as the prime example of a person not integrated into society nor accepted by it. However, he was able to maintain at the same time that it was the stubbornness of the Jewish people that kept Christ suffering on the cross. He was also capable of caustic verbal attacks on Jews, if he considered them to be too money-focused and avaricious. His 1892 book *Le Salut par les Juifs* contains some uncomfortable images which could, even in those very different times from our own, be deemed anti-semitic. Some of these images were common at that time to those on the 'left', as Gildea's comment cited earlier in this chapter shows. The 1905 reprinting of *Le Salut par les Juifs* was dedicated by Bloy to Raïssa, and was financed by Jacques and Raïssa, who both, Raïssa especially, found abundant excuses for some of his more excessive statements. Certainly, Bloy made an impact on Jacques, who, fifteen years later in 'A Propos de la «question juive»' took up Bloy's image of the Jewish people as a

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Royal, 'Péguy, Dreyfus, Maritain' in *Jacques Maritain and the Jews* ed. by Robert Royal (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 194-213 (p.201).

<sup>22</sup> Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism*, p.69.

chosen people who by their very nature are revolutionaries: 'un peuple [...] jouera fatalement dans le monde un rôle de subversion'.<sup>23</sup>

Another significant influence on Maritain came in the form of Maurras. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, many Catholic (and some non-Catholic) right-wing intellectuals subscribed to the newspaper *Action Française*, the mouthpiece of the organisation of the same name, which, despite Maurras's own atheism, railed against a government that had, in 1905, divorced Church from State in the wake of the Dreyfus affair. The *Action Française* supported the restoration of the monarchy and as time passed, especially after the Russian Revolution, it became increasingly racist and anti-semitic. As we have already seen, both Jacques and Raïssa maintained in later years that Jacques' relationship with Maurras and his association with the whole *Action Française* movement was a product of his desire to follow the recommendations of his post-conversion spiritual adviser, Clérissac, who saw in *Action Française*, apparently, a protest against the materialism of modern society. Yet these efforts to distance Jacques from an association which he viewed, with the benefit of hindsight, as undesirable sit uneasily with the actual depth of his relationship with Maurras. As shown in Chapter Two, Maritain and Maurras co-founded the *Revue universelle* after the First World War and Maritain broke off this close connection with Maurras only after the 1926 papal condemnation and prohibition of *Action Française*, along with a ban on some of Maurras's own work. The potential ambiguities in Maritain's attitude are illustrated further by an episode which took place as late as 1925. Maurras stood accused of making threats against the French (Jewish) Interior Minister and, as a protest against this, his followers (the 'Camelots du Roi') launched anti-semitic invective against the Minister. In his 1926 letter to Cocteau, Maritain deplored the tone of the protest, but

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<sup>23</sup> Maritain, 'A Propos de la « question juive »', p. 62.

still went ahead to defend Maurras in court. Of course in the same year he gave a defence, albeit qualified, of Maurras in his book *Une opinion sur Charles Maurras*. According to Richard Crane, Maritain 'deluded himself'<sup>24</sup> when he spoke of Maurras solely as a philosopher with a right to free speech. This was not the last time that Maritain was damaged by his naivety and lack of judgement (or, depending on one's standpoint, his capacity for self-deception). For his part, Maurras writing scathingly at the end of his life deemed that it was Maritain who was the consummate opportunist and dubbed him a teacher of philosophy who lacked the talent to be a philosopher himself.<sup>25</sup>

After his association with Maurras finally broke down in the late 1920s, Maritain withdrew to his house at Meudon, where he focused on speculative philosophy and his retreats and seminars. However, as the 1930s progressed, rising European tensions made it almost impossible for Maritain not to comment on political and social issues. During the Spanish Civil War, Maritain, along with Mauriac, spoke out against Franco, and in doing so swam against the tide of general Catholic support. At the same time his attitude to the temporal position of the Jews, at least, also appeared to be undergoing major modification.

### **Political and social considerations: the late 1930s and beyond**

Maritain's writings about the Jews from the 1930s onwards moved through three broad stages. The first stage contained a cluster of works, written very closely together at a time of grave crisis and is typified by the 1938 essay, 'Les Juifs parmi les nations'. This was derived from a speech delivered in February of the same year and outlined a

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Crane, 'Surviving Maurras: Jacques Maritain's Jewish Question' in *Naming Race, Naming Racisms* ed. by Jonathan Judaken (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), pp. 51-77 (p.65).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.76.

specific application of the personalist philosophy of *Humanisme intégral*. In December 1938 Maritain delivered the talk once more, this time in English with additions to reflect the fast-moving events of the intervening months and then committed this version to paper in the 1939 work *Antisemitism*. Echoes of what Maritain said can be heard in other works, including 1937's 'L'impossible antisémitisme' (later re-titled 'Le Mystère d'Israël'). The second phase consisted of the essays he wrote from exile in America during the Second World War, where his focus turned to rallying the French and to insisting to the rest of the world that the French people was not anti-semitic. The final stage comprised a small number of works from the 1960s, including the preface and conclusion to the 1965 collection, *Le Mystère d'Israël*, notes to earlier essays and the works *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and *De L'Église du Christ*. Much of this later work concentrated on spiritual matters, but Maritain still had things to say on the subject of the state of Israel.

In his works of the 1930s, Maritain was consistently firm in his view that the distinctiveness of the Jews had to be accepted by the prototype and embryonic pluralist and personalist society he had set out in *Humanisme intégral*. His position contrasted sharply with that which he had taken in 1921, where he had proposed that Jews must choose between full integration into their chosen country of residence or exile from it. He opened *Antisemitism* with a discussion of what he called political anti-Semitism, a phenomenon that he believed not only falsified and exaggerated data about the Jews, but also destroyed the atmosphere of mutual understanding and collaboration which was necessary for rational discussion. Furthermore, he said, this political anti-Semitism showed a state to be weak because it revealed itself as unable or unwilling to utilise the strengths of every section of its people to enhance its reputation in both the short and long term, instead insisting on the 'eviction' (in the earlier French version, and changed

to 'extermination' in the later English version) of its Jews. The absence of any tolerance of rational discussion then created a vacuum which enabled emotional arguments to flourish (as we will see in Chapter Four the falsehood of logic in 'irrational' arguments was something that Maritain despised, just as Sartre did. For Maritain, such emotional irrationality was something that was not truly French). Furthermore, such arguments would trigger not just political but also racial anti-Semitism, which took as its target not only those Jews who kept themselves separate from the rest of society, and who thus presented a potential political threat, but also those who had integrated into society, had fought in wars for their country and, had, perhaps, even converted to Christianity. Ironically, the whole idea of the Jews as a race was itself a 'racial myth', said Maritain, as the Jews, as with all other people, comprise a mixture of different blood, and could be considered as a race only in the loosest sense; perhaps as a kind of social grouping. Maritain noted the tendency of the anti-Semite to generalise from the specific (echoing Sartre who commented that the anti-Semite started with the general and looked for specifics to confirm his prejudice), attributing the shortcomings of one or two Jews to the whole people. Instead of using perceived competition from Jews in the professions and business as a stimulus to raise the bar in terms of general performance for the good of the whole of society, the anti-Semite took no personal responsibility but simply blamed the Jews for all financial hardship. Drawing a parallel with left-wing Marxism, Maritain stated that what one should be attacking and attempting to transform were the very underlying economical and social structures of a materialistic society. Instead anti-Semitism was a chosen diversion and distraction which anti-Semites were able to use as an excuse not to tackle real problems. However, where the comparison with Marxism fell away was Maritain's refusal to confuse capitalism, which he felt could be harnessed for the common good, with materialism, which he believed corrupted man's



soul. He had already made the distinction between capitalism and materialism very clear in *Humanisme intégral*. In *Antisemitism* he quoted Marx, whom he felt had made a significant link between the Jewish and the capitalist's 'spirit of adventure', and who had concluded that the Jew felt most at home in a capitalist society. Maritain built on this point, using Germany as illustration. Capitalism, he said, had been the economic model there before Hitler's accession to power, and had also been a place where the Jews had been integrated both socially and culturally. However, after Hitler's rise capitalism had failed, and Germany became a country which Maritain described as 'pathetic' and where the 'poisons of humiliation have been nurtured and stored up'.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this failure Germany began to hate itself and turned on its assimilated Jewish population as a scapegoat for this self-loathing. Yet the Jews, Maritain maintained, continued to love Germany, or at least the out-of-date version of it that had preceded the 1930s. Ironically, the Germans, he said, had actually adopted the perceived worst qualities of the Jews in their persecution of them, because 'carnal' Jews also delighted in racial pride and the idea of their 'divine election'.<sup>27</sup> So, interestingly, there is still evidence that Maritain was not averse to applying stereotypes, even in the late 1930s, and he was also still quoting Bloy's image of the Jews as a dyke blocking a river in order to raise its level.<sup>28</sup> To justify taking action against them, the Germans insisted that the Jews were an enemy blood race, and moreover an inferior blood race. Thus: 'scientifically, racism seems chiefly a sort of political distortion of anthropology, mobilised to furnish a practical criterion of the German national community'.<sup>29</sup> The Jews, consistently the victims of prejudice, were forced to face particular difficulties, not only in Germany although this was the prime example, because of the bite of harsh economic conditions

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<sup>26</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Antisemitism* (London: The Centenary Press, 1939), p.10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

and the rise of totalitarian politics, which had no time for the individualism and independence which was, apparently, favoured by the Jews. Completely consistent with his usual themes Maritain stated that what was needed was 'a pluralism founded on the dignity of the human person'<sup>30</sup> and a total equality of civic rights and respect for the liberties of the person. Again, as was his custom, Maritain offered little detail on how to achieve this although at the end of *Antisemitism* he did outline some tentative steps, including the proposal of mass emigration from places of persecution to countries that were more liberal, before concluding sadly that the large numbers involved made this impractical. Palestine itself was an option, but, again, could not accommodate the numbers. Therefore, he turned his attention towards those countries with a large land mass and small populations (including some of the French colonies) and concluded that while France would, naturally, be open to such an initiative with its customary magnanimous nature, other suitable countries, such as Australia, showed 'scanty generosity.'<sup>31</sup> He did concede that even if such relocation were a possibility, substantial financial resources would be needed to make it happen, and these were thin on the ground. Ultimately, such measures could be nothing but a 'mere palliative'<sup>32</sup>, even if countries were open-handed (and, again unsurprisingly, he singled out America for its benevolence) because the vital atmosphere of understanding and collaboration needed to make the change happen would still be missing. Therefore, it was likely that the same issues would arise again unless a change of emphasis took place, with the material world no longer paramount, but harnessed instead to the spiritual, 'subordinated to the spirit of justice' and subject to what is truly important; 'love and truth alone'.<sup>33</sup> Such principles are distilled into their most potent form in 1942's *Les droits de l'homme et la*

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.56.

*loi naturelle*, where Maritain applied St Thomas's principle of natural law to the world as it was suffering during the Second World War. This book, in turn, appeared to influence Maritain's often-attributed efforts as a member of the drafting committee of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **Maritain and Christophobia**

The Nazis' view of the Jews as an alien race constituted, in Maritain's view, an 'insult' to Christianity,<sup>34</sup> which had at its heart the concept of all men being equal and free. Léon Poliakov, a Russian-born Jew who wrote what is generally regarded as the first detailed account of the destruction of the Jews, the *Bréviaire de la haine* in 1951, deemed Nazism to be a religion and, furthermore, a religion that required a devil: the Jew.

Poliakov was well aware that many of his readers would be Catholics and were likely to take offence at not only the title of his book (a reference to the Catholic daily prayer book) but also at the obvious links that could be made between the devil-Jew of Nazism and the condemned Christ-killing Jew of Catholicism. Therefore, he looked for a respected Catholic intellectual to preface the work, to give him some measure of credibility with Catholic audiences and hence a hearing. Maritain was his first choice, yet Maritain refused to take the task on and Poliakov instead secured the services of Mauriac. Jonathan Judaken tells us that Maritain's objection was his perception that the book implied that the Pope shared the anti-Semitism of the Nazis.<sup>35</sup> Once again Maritain's respectful obedience to the Vatican is apparent. Despite Maritain's refusal to endorse his book, Poliakov revered him and credited him with inspiration, especially for his insights into how the Nazis hated not only Jews but Christ and by logical progression

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Judaken 'Léon Poliakov, the Origins of Holocaust Studies, and Theories of Anti-Semitism: Re-reading *Bréviaire de la Haine*' in *Post-Holocaust France and the Jews* (New York: NYU Press, 2014) proof copy pp.1-28 (p.13).

Christians too. From his exile in America during the Second World War, Maritain himself wrote frequently of the paganism of the Nazis and how it was subscribed to by people who felt that they had been forced into the moral constraints of Christianity and who subconsciously loathed both it and the Jewish roots that had given it life. Maritain linked together time and again Jews and Christians in suffering and persecution. However, whatever his intentions, the result for Judaken at least of such a linkage is that his argument 'constitutes a Christianizing of Jewish persecution. Jewish persecution is recognized only in light of the Christian supercessionist metanarrative that re-inscribes Jews within the dramaturgy of the Christian salvation story where their role is at best witnesses to the truth of Christianity'.<sup>36</sup> This is of course the point at which Maritain begins, in the eyes of some, to tip into philosophical anti-Semitism.

### **Maritain's writings from exile during the Second World War**

In this first stage of Maritain's writings on the Jews, hints of the second can be seen. Maritain bestowed on France (and also on the Vatican and America) a generosity of spirit towards the Jews which he did not always extend to other countries such as Australia. The magnanimous nature he attributed to France had to withstand severe provocation. Crane reports that at Maritain's public lecture in Paris in 1938 ('Les Juifs parmi les nations'), he was heckled severely and accused of being bought by the Jews or of being a Jew himself. Maritain had already withstood tough criticism from fellow Catholics such as Paul Claudel over his refusal to support Franco and had been subjected to insults in the popular press because of his Jewish-born wife. It was brave of him to deliver the lecture in the first place. However, the uproar was so great that the president of the Paris municipal council thought it best that the lecture was not

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<sup>36</sup> Judaken 'Léon Poliakov, the Origins of Holocaust Studies', p.22.

repeated.<sup>37</sup> In *Antisemitism*, presaging the response that he would give to Poliakov more than a decade later, Maritain stressed the Pope's strong defence of the Jews and also the extent of the specific assistance he had provided to them in the Papal state itself. He quoted the well-known speech given by the Pope in 1938 which stated that 'spiritually we are Semites'.<sup>38</sup> Yet it is almost superfluous to state that the position of the Catholic Church on the subject of anti-Semitism was and still is a cause of widespread and on-going debate. An illustration of the differing views is shown in a letter to Maritain from Yves Simon in 1941. Simon commented using Garrigou-Lagrange's position as evidence, that if St Thomas were alive he would be on the side of Pétain. However, Maritain maintained in *Antisemitism*, as he did in other works, that the French could never be truly anti-semitic because it was not part of their nature. They 'worship the goddess of Reason' while French youth operate from a base of 'liberty, generosity and intelligence'; if the French ever mock the Jews it is in teasing way, as they do with their priests).<sup>39</sup> Fundamentally they were too much in thrall to 'reason'. He had already hinted a year earlier in 'Le Mystère d'Israël' that the French would 'scorn' anti-Semitism (LM 58). An atmosphere of petty bourgeois ideology was what he believed was needed for anti-Semitism to flourish; a view he shared with Sartre and one which will be explored further in Chapter Four.

From his (self-imposed) exile in the United States during the Second World War, Maritain, pushed by de Gaulle, broadcast rhetorical speeches, designed to rally his homeland and also wrote a number of essays, which were distributed by stealth in France. The general themes repeated time and again in these works were France's proud history and spirit, as evoked by legendary figures, and the blueprint he felt was

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<sup>37</sup> Crane, *Passion of Israel*, p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> Maritain, *Antisemitism*, p.27.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.21.

necessary for a new version of democracy, fundamentally Christian in spirit, and yet one that could also incorporate aspects of American society. However, a significant problem faced Maritain, one which threatened to eradicate the image of France as a noble captive of 'pagan' Germany. This was France's real and actual treatment of its Jews, which in some cases was far from the approach of 'reason' with which he credited his countrymen. Maritain set out to tackle this challenge in his 1942 radio broadcast and essay 'La persécution raciste en France', which was also included in the 1965 collection. His tactic was to lay the blame for the treatment of the Jews, not at the feet of the French as a whole but at the door of the Vichy administration. For example, the essay begins with the statement that a 'new shame' 'had been inflicted' on France (LM 159). The complicity of the Vichy government in the deportation of Jews seems almost certain; Mandel among many others puts forward justification that the Vichy collaboration led directly to the deportation and murder of a quarter of the Jewish population in France.<sup>40</sup> What is left in question is the role of ordinary French citizens. Maritain chose to stress both the support that individual Frenchmen gave to Jews (e.g. hiding them in mountains and forests, denunciations of cruelty by priests) and the lack of active participation of the French people as a whole in the administrative process: 'Le gouvernement de M. Laval se déclare incapable de résister à la pression allemande' (LM 159). Yet, even allowing for this pressure, he maintained that Laval and, to a lesser extent, Pétain, were incapable of representing the spirit of France (typically St Louis and St Joan) because they had sold it into dishonour and slavery. The French, declared Maritain, suffered under the government's collaboration as much as the Jews (a theme he had introduced in 1940 in *A travers le désastre*, where he had compared the defeated

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<sup>40</sup> Mandel, *Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France*, p.52.

French with the suffering Jews<sup>41</sup>), because they, from their 'terre humaine et fidèle', were forced to give up as a result of 'l'ignominie bestiale du racisme nazi' (LM 160) the very Jews they had welcomed and the Jews who had fought for them. The soul of France was suffering, he claimed. A 'sacred thing' was being 'soiled' and 'poisoned' by implication, and Maritain pleaded with the French to stop their country 'losing its soul' by venting their anger against the oppressors and by showing pity to the oppressed (LM 160). Through praying and by continuing to hide and defend the Jews the French could protect 'l'honneur blessé, l'honneur trahi de la France' (LM 161). Given the circumstances in which he broadcast to the French and the purpose of such speeches, it is not surprising that Maritain attributed such generosity of spirit to the nation as whole. By addressing himself in emotive terms which would appeal to the better nature of the French, he attempted to inspire his homeland to behave in the spirit of their heroes. He sacrificed the logical argument of reason, something that according to him was loved by the French, and substituted instead blatant tugs on the heart strings: a tactic that he had already declared could lead to a false outcome caused by a lack of reason. By deploying such a technique he turned a wilful blind eye to the hard evidence that there was widespread anti-Semitism in France.

### **Maritain's social and political writings on the Jews after the Second World War**

After the war, Maritain wrote less frequently on the specific subject of the Jews. When he did write, in this third phase, his work dealt more with spiritual issues than temporal ones. Some writers such as Mandel claim that the Jews themselves were quiet after the war: 'what is most striking about the immediate postwar years is the *absence* of Jews

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<sup>41</sup>Jacques Maritain, *A travers le désastre* (Paris : Editions des Deux-Rives, 1946), p.22.

from public discourse' (her italics).<sup>42</sup> De Gaulle did not want to single out the specific suffering of the Jews from general French suffering and many Jews followed this lead, although it may be rather unrealistic to claim that they were totally quiet. Strong centralism was indeed in evidence in the first year or two of post-war life. Many Jews returned to their hometowns, seeking to reclaim their property and houses, which were now occupied by others, who had, more often than not, bought them in good faith. Such a situation, naturally, gave rise to enormous legal complications, which took many years to resolve. It also exposed Jews to renewed anti-semitic hostility, necessitating in many cases their dependence on charity, especially from the United States. Yet, even in these extremely trying circumstances the majority of Jews did not protest loudly and preferred to try to assimilate back into French life as best they could in order to regain whatever security they thought they had felt before. As Mandel comments, this helped create the myth that France had presented one united and heroic front during the war; 'a trend (that) had already begun to take root, which de-emphasized the suffering of particular minorities in an effort to point to French solidarity and heroism in a time of war'.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, this seemed to be the line taken by the new government: 'De Gaulle and his followers, actively seeking to distance themselves from the recent past, thus adopted a rhetoric that stressed French unity above all else. Focusing on the particularity of Jewish suffering could only detract from this goal'.<sup>44</sup>

It was only in the 1960s that a re-examination of what had actually happened during the war finally began. At that time, of course, Maritain was assembling *Le Mystère d'Israël*, in which he added his thoughts on the state of Israel to his essays on more theological issues. He had wanted to visit Israel, but ill health had prevented him

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<sup>42</sup> Mandel, *Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France*, p.53.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.56.



from doing so and he was forced to contain himself to remarks in a postscript to his collection. This began with firm support for the Jews' claim on Israel, which, he said, had, quite uniquely, been given to them by God himself (LM 243). Admitting that he knew he would be seen as an unrealistic Utopian, he expressed hope that Muslims would abandon their claim 'en vertu de cette résignation à l'événement témoin des volontés d'Allah qui est un trait si profondément caractéristique de l'Islam' (LM 244).

The establishment of the state of Israel meant a 'brotherly tension' between the state of Israel and the Jewish populations of other countries. To the latter, full rights of citizenship in whichever country they lived, in customs and morals as well as in law, must be granted, including respect for their spiritual identity both as Jews and as people of God. The state of Israel was something that bound them, not just in a temporal but in a spiritual way. Jerusalem was not only Israel's capital, but the 'head of the people of God'. Ever keen to make links between Jews and Catholics, Maritain drew a direct comparison between the Jews of the world and their relationship to Israel with Catholics and their relationship to Rome. Therefore, in terms of the political and social dimension of the relationship between Catholic and Jew, Maritain kept to a constant path from the 1930s onwards. He had moved decisively from his 1921 position of imposing general safety measures on the civic right of Jews and by the mid 1960s he was unambiguous about the full freedoms the Jews should enjoy, going even further than many of his contemporaries, and also about the duty of the Christian to ensure that these were granted: 'Dénoncer les erreurs et les crimes du racisme et de l'antisémitisme est un des devoirs urgents de la conscience chrétienne' (LM avant-propos). Anti-Semitism had no part in the Christian code of behaviour.

### **Aspect two: The mystery of Israel, Maritain's theology and philosophy**

As we saw in Chapter Two, Maritain's increasingly liberal position over the decades on the rights of the person co-existed with an uncompromising theological stance, and in this respect, as was usual his position in respect of the Jews specifically did not change. If anything, it hardened. At the heart of his writings on the spiritual and theological aspect of Jewish-Christian relations were his thoughts on the 'mystery' of Israel, which he had derived from St Paul's letter to the Romans. Almost all of the essays in his definitive 1960s collection spoke of it, often accompanied by the same lengthy citations from the letter. He even repeated the same themes in his final work *De L'Église du Christ*.

'A Propos de la «question juive»' was significant not only because it was the first of Maritain's writings on Catholic-Jewish relations (and because of the interesting and revelatory nature of some of its statements), but also because it introduced the key principles at the heart of what he perceived to be the 'mystery' of Israel. Alongside the essay's potentially anti-semitic statements on political and social matters, Maritain spoke of the need to venerate the Jews as the people of Christ and as the ancestors of Christianity. He stated, even in this very first work, that it was impossible to be both a Christian and an anti-Semite, because being an anti-Semite meant insulting the race from which Christ and his mother came, and this in turn attacked Christianity. His belief in the closeness of the relation between Judaism and Christianity was illustrated by his references to St Paul's words, which had likened the Jews to natural branches of an olive tree onto which Christians had been grafted after the tree had been established. All branches, natural and grafted, are nourished by sap from the same root and that source is Judaism. Maritain used this image repeatedly most notably in the 1941 series of

essays (included in the 1965 collection) entitled 'L'enseignement de Saint Paul'. These, like other works, contained extracts from St Paul's letter to the Romans. In this the Jews were the original branches of the olive tree, nourished by the 'sap' of God but, due to the poor choice they had made in rejecting Christ and choosing the world instead, God had punished them by cutting them from the tree and had grafted on in their place the branches of the Gentiles, who were now able to grow naturally on this wild olive tree: 'c'est la face complémentaire du mystère du faux-pas d' Israël' (LM 152). However, the punishment meted to the Jews was not permanent and an acceptance of Christ and reconciliation with the Church would be sufficient grounds for the Jewish branches themselves to be 'grafted back on' to their native olive tree. In summary, the Jews could only gain salvation by conversion to Christianity. Conversely, if Christians began to kneel to the temporal world as the Jews had done (one of the central themes of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*) or became arrogant and overly proud of their own new position on the olive tree, God would cut them off in the same way as he had cut off the Jews:

Or, si quelques-uns des rameaux ont été retranchés, et si toi, olivier sauvage, tu as été enté parmi les rameaux, pour bénéficier avec eux de la racine et de la sève de l'olivier, ne te glorifie pas à l'encontre des branches. Vas-tu faire l'arrogant? Ce n'est pas toi qui portes la racine, c'est la racine qui te porte. Tu diras : des rameaux ont été retranchés afin que moi je sois enté? Sans doute. Ils ont été retranchés à cause de leur incrédulité ; et toi, tu es là par la Foi. Ne va

pas t'enorgueillir ; crains plutôt, car si Dieu n'a pas épargné les rameaux naturels, prends garde qu'il ne t'épargne pas, toi non plus.<sup>45</sup>

And :

Tandis qu'eux, s'ils ne demeurent pas dans l'incrédulité, ils seront entés. Dieu a le pouvoir de les enter de nouveau. En effet, si toi tu as été coupé sur l'olivier sauvage, auquel tu appartenais par nature, pour être enté, contrairement à ta nature, sur l'olivier franc, combien plus ceux-ci pourront-ils être entés sur leur propre olivier, eux qui lui appartiennent par nature?<sup>46</sup>

Despite their error in choosing the temporal world over the spiritual, the Jews remained the people of God, honoured because of their ancestry. Their mistake was not irreversible and the 'veil' that had come down on their 'hearts' could yet be lifted, '[c]ar les promesses de Dieu sont sans repentance' (LM 153).

In the 1937 essay 'Le Mystère d'Israël', Maritain indicated that the transgressors who had instigated the commission of this poor choice were not, in fact, the Jewish people as a whole, but the Jewish preachers, 'les mauvais gardiens de la vigne, les tueurs de prophètes' (LM 33), who had had a political agenda for choosing the world (parallels can be drawn here with the positions of the French people as a whole and the Vichy government, as noted earlier in this chapter). As a result of this action, the people became a 'captive' and 'hostage' of the world. Thus, the suffering of the Jewish people

<sup>45</sup> Romans XI. 13-21, quoted in *Le Mystère d'Israël*, (1965), p.152.

<sup>46</sup> Romans XI 23-24, quoted in *Le Mystère d'Israël*, (1965), p.153.

resulted from the malice of men, not God, who had instead pity and love for the Jews. Maritain quoted Bloy at this point (thus little had changed in this respect even by the late 1930s), who said the Jews were the ‘apple of God’s eye’ (LM 38). Maritain, like St Paul, saw the fate of the Jews not as a puzzle to be solved, but as a mystery without solution to be contemplated. To Maritain the reconciliation of Jews and Christians in the true Church marked the beginning of a new dawn, and to illustrate this point (and perhaps to tie the 1965 collection firmly to his best-received work), he included a short section from *Humanisme intégral* where he laid out St Thomas’s teaching that the reintegration of the Jews would be the most significant sign of a ‘third age’ of the Church and of Christianity, after the times of the Old and the New Testaments (LM 18).

For some commentators, notably Rabbi Leon Klenicki and John Hellman, Maritain’s belief that Christianity was the fulfilment of and a more perfect version of Judaism, as he demonstrated very clearly in *Antisemitism* when he declared that that ‘Christianity, then, is the overflowing expansion and the supernatural fulfilment of Judaism’<sup>47</sup> revealed him to be harbouring anti-semitic tendencies at a deep and, possibly, unconscious level. The suspicions of some became even stronger as a result of his frequent comparisons of Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis with the sufferings of Christians and even that of Christ himself. For example, when editing the 1965 collection he chose to preface the 1937 version of the essay ‘Le Mystère d’Israël’ with a 1940 passage from the Jewish writer, Maurice Samuel, whom Poliakov credited as the first person to delineate the themes of such Christophobia. Samuel was quite explicit about the real target of the Nazis: ‘[c]’est du Christ que les Nazis-Fascistes ont peur [...] C’est LUI qu’ils sont follement décidés à anéantir’ (Samuel’s capitals). However, Samuel concluded, Christianity was too deeply rooted, and so the Jews were targeted instead

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<sup>47</sup> Maritain, *Antisemitism*, p.16.

(LM 23). Thus, the Nazis may have said that they wanted to obliterate the killers of Christ, but in reality they wanted to rid themselves of the people who brought Christ into existence in the first place. Crane maintains that Maritain never relinquished the view that the Jews had a mission to disturb the world, and, in fact, he sanctified this mission.<sup>48</sup> He presented the Jews as a chosen people who, in making a bad decision in opting for the temporal world, had become victims and prisoners of it. By assigning this role to the Jews, Maritain had left himself open to accusations that he had created yet another stereotype, the 'Sacred Jew', no matter how well-intentioned he had set out to be. The theme of the Jews' 'necessary' suffering was woven throughout Maritain's writings and became ever stronger over time as his works concentrated increasingly on the spiritual side of the 'mystery of Israel' (which he used, of course, for the name of his chosen definitive collection). Maritain's position was always that the 'Jewish question' had to be framed almost exclusively as a mystery of the theological order, impossible to judge, either speculatively or practically, unless a Christian spirit and point of view was taken, and inspired and influenced by St Paul's teachings on the subject:

Pour nous la question juive est *d'abord* (je ne dis pas exclusivement) un mystère d'ordre théologique ; il reste aussi que nous affirmons que ni spéculativement ni pratiquement un chrétien ne peut juger de la question juive (ni d'aucune des grandes questions éthico-sociales qui importent à l'histoire humaine et à la civilisation) sans se placer dans les perspectives de la doctrine chrétienne et de l'esprit chrétien (LM 121).

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Crane, "'Heart-Rending Ambivalence': Jacques Maritain and the Complexity of Postwar Catholic Philosemitism", *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, Volume 6 (2011), 1-16 (p.6).

In the 1964 postscript to *Le Mystère d'Israël*, in almost his final words on the subject, Maritain took pains once more to show the similarities rather than the differences between the Catholic Church, Christ and the Jewish faith. In doing so he echoed his words of two decades earlier. In 1943 at a lecture in New York he had stated that 'the passion of Israel today is taking on more and more distinctly the form of the cross [...] the greatest mass crucifixion in history' <sup>49</sup> and in the 1944 essay 'La Passion d'Israël' he wrote: 'Juifs et chrétiens sont persécutés ensemble et par les mêmes ennemis; les chrétiens parce qu'ils sont les fidèles du Christ. Et les Juifs parce qu'ils ont donné le Christ au monde' (LM 203). Yet even while he attempted to paint this picture of commonality, still he looked at the Jewish faith only through Catholic eyes. We have already seen how he compared the state of Israel with the Catholic Church, concluding that both had a spiritual centre which most of its faithful did not inhabit and that they were bound instead by loyalty to their country of residence (although he conceded that, unlike the Catholic Church, Judaism also had a God-given territory, in which at least some of the faithful could live). Most controversial of all was his comparison of the suffering of the Jews, firstly at the hands of the Romans and then even more so during the Holocaust, with the suffering of Catholics (for example, those priests who died in concentration camps) and with Christ. He said : 'une sorte d'énigmatique et terrifiante similarité entre la passion du peuple de Dieu en marche, dans la nuit du monde, vers sa destinée finale, et la Passion du Fils de Dieu accomplissant, dans la grande nuit sacrée des dessins éternels, l'œuvre de la rédemption du genre humain' (LM 252). This echoes a striking image from the essay 'Le Mystère d'Israël' where he presented the entire

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<sup>49</sup> Maritain quoted in Crane, *Passion of Israel, Jacques Maritain, Catholic Conscience and the Holocaust*, (2010), p.69.

Jewish people as having been ‘mis en croix’ (LM 22). This comparison of Jewish suffering with the cross of Christ has been viewed as deeply offensive in some Jewish quarters (for example, Klenicki commented that this last image was ‘painful and even offensive to the Jewish people’<sup>50</sup>).

The final words of the postscript to the 1965 collection which Maritain chose to present, after setting out the obvious differences of belief in Christ as the Son of God, were a last attempt to unite Jews and Christians (LM 253). He portrayed both peoples as suffering and called for the God of Israel and the saviour of the world to come to this earth in glory. Striking too in its prominence was his inclusion, at the very beginning of the collection, of Raïssa’s 1947 poem, ‘Le Nom d’Israël’, which contains the lines:

Israël! Israël! Nom sincère

Echo de larmes et de cris (LM 9).

### **Links with *Le Paysan de la Garonne***

As seen in Chapter Two, Maritain opened *Le Paysan de la Garonne* with a statement of clear support for both the Pope and the established dogma of the Catholic Church and maintained that the intention of the Second Vatican Council was not to change this dogma but merely to place it in a context that was meaningful for a modern audience. If it were the case that the Church’s key teachings should be preserved, it follows by implication that the Church’s stance on Catholic-Jewish relations would also remain

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<sup>50</sup> Leon Klenicki, ‘Jacques Maritain’s Vision of Judaism and Anti-Semitism’ in *Jacques Maritain and the Jews* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p.85.



essentially the same. Of course, the Church had been open to accusations of anti-Semitism for many centuries. Surely then Maritain was faced with a dilemma post-Council, wishing as he declared to support the Church's dogma but also being firmly opposed to anti-Semitism? Certainly, there is evidence that he did feel uncomfortable; for example, there is the disappointment he expressed to Julien Green when the Council refused to soften some of its more anti-semitic prayers in the liturgy of Good Friday.<sup>51</sup> It would seem that there was one part of Catholic dogma at least with which Maritain did not feel comfortable and to which he did not give his wholehearted support.

His discussion of Catholic-Jewish relations in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* has two themes. Firstly, Maritain outlines how Catholics are to behave towards non-Catholics and non-Christians. In these passages he rarely mentions the Jewish people by name nor does he single them out from other groups of non Christians; perhaps, given his overwhelming desire to support the Vatican, this was more diplomatic than choosing to deal with the subject explicitly. Secondly, time and again, just as he did in his earlier works, he links the Catholic Church implicitly with the Jewish faith through images, language and the theme of suffering. Echoing so much of his writing, notably the postscript to *Le Mystère d'Israël*, *Le Paysan de la Garonne* looks increasingly like it really is his testament in this key respect.

When talking of the correct form of relations between Catholics and non-Catholics, Maritain, as ever, presented little detailed guidance, but described instead the spirit that he felt should underpin behaviour and conduct. In doing so, he drew heavily on the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the genesis and drafting of which he is often associated. He did, however, talk explicitly in this work about the

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<sup>51</sup> Doering, *Jacques Maritain and the French Catholic Intellectuals*, p.225.

difficulty of making Christian principles concrete (PG 41). Instead of providing a blueprint of such a society, Maritain promoted again, as in earlier works, a pluralist, tolerant society where all parties were free to defend their own beliefs robustly. He saw such a defence as being entirely a positive thing, signifying a greater sign of love and respect of others than a lukewarm attempt to please others by dissembling about one's real faith (PG 110). Besides this guidance on the necessary cooperation on practical, humanitarian and charitable works and on general world peace, Maritain also spoke about the relationship of Catholics, non-Catholics and even non-Christians to Christ and the Church. Thus, following his own prescription to defend robustly one's own faith, he defined man's spiritual position in relation to Catholicism (PG 115). This statement of his position is one of the clearest Maritain ever gave. He detailed it further in *De L'Église du Christ*,<sup>52</sup> where he examined a whole range of religions, including Buddhism and Islam, as they related to Catholicism, besides sweeping in more obscure 'religions', such as the practices of hippies at the Isle of Wight festival in the late 1960s (DE 205).

One of the touchstones of Maritain's tolerance for other religions was his assertion in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* that Christ came into the world to save all men. Therefore, each man had to be at least a potential (albeit invisible) member of the Catholic Church (he delineates very carefully a number of divisions and sub-divisions of membership, but holds to the underpinning principle). As all men have some class of membership of the Church, Maritain stated that they were also required to have fraternal feelings towards one another, to want to help one another, and to work together sincerely for the greater good. The climax of his argument is his presupposition that all non-Christians, even if cultural and other issues prevent them accepting Christ,

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<sup>52</sup> Jacques Maritain, *De l'Église du Christ La Personne de l'Église et son personnel* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970), p.205. Henceforth '*De l'Église du Christ*' (DE).

operate from a basis of good faith, unless some event proves this to be otherwise (PG 110). Although Maritain never strayed from the view he had held since his conversion (that heresy is a mortal sin), the difference which reveals itself in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, compared with earlier works, was that he believed that the 'sinner' could now be assumed to act from good motives rather than from bad and so it is possible to love the sinner not only for what he might become if he were to convert, but also for what he actually is at present: 'Et donc on les aime d'abord et avant tout comme ils sont et tels qu'ils sont, en cherchant leur propre bien' (PG 112).

Even so, Maritain still maintained that it was the duty of the Catholic to try to convert his fellow men, Jews included, in order to bestow on them some kind of visible recognition (almost like promotion to a top division). As we saw earlier in this chapter, one of Maritain's fundamental beliefs was that the reconciliation between Jews and Catholics would be the marker of a new age in the Church. As only Christians are capable of distinguishing between the temporal and the spiritual and between what is God's and what is not (i.e. Caesar's), conversion of non-Christians would have a profound effect on both the individual and on the body of the Church as a whole. The fraternal love the Catholic feels for his non-Christian brother is bound to bring him great pain and suffering precisely because that brother is not a Christian. We have seen already how Maritain likened Jewish suffering to that of Christ, saying that they shared 'une sorte d'énigmatique et terrifiante similarité' (LM 252). In *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, taking up this theme once more, he stated that Christians themselves came to God through suffering and had to sacrifice everything on earth so that they could live in glory. Constant vigilance was necessary when the Christian's fellow man criticised or even negated the Christian's faith. To keep strong, the Christian needed to hold onto 'l'amour

de la Croix', (PG 125) even at a time when the symbol of the cross was utterly out of favour.

Besides dwelling on the theme of suffering, with which he had already linked and continued to unite Catholics and Jews, Maritain introduced a further bond between the two religions by referring to both as 'mysteries'. The 'mystery' of Israel has been examined already in this chapter. The 'mystery' of the Catholic Church, which Maritain alluded to only vaguely in earlier works, is given substance in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. The heart of the 'mystery' is that the Church is in the world, but is not of the world and so cannot be part of it. As seen in Chapter Two Maritain talked at length in the work of the grave error of what he termed as kneeling before the world, and of the importance of choosing the spiritual world over the temporal (a theme present in his works since the 1920s). This calls to mind those writings, derived from St Paul, about the bad choice made by the Jews in opting for the temporal world. Maritain appeared to be signalling that there were common threads between the Jewish faith and bad Catholic practice; again something very likely to be viewed as highly critical of the Jewish faith. Individual Catholics would have to find a way of living in the world (whether as priests or as laypersons of various descriptions) through practice of tolerance and love of fellow men and through compliance with the external apparatus of the Church. Ultimately, however, they are marked by their baptism for the Church in heaven and even if some of its members are sinful, the Church remains a 'mystery', one as profound as the incarnation, with a spiritual and sinless core (PG 270).

Yet another way in which Maritain linked Catholics and Jews together was his definition of both groups as 'peoples'. Catholics, he said, have individual souls, which they must nurture through silent contemplation, but he was equally clear that there was

a communal element to Catholicism, seen primarily in the liturgy, which stores up 'treasure' for the whole Church. Catholicism cannot be practised in private. Maritain took inspiration from one of the Council's key documents, *Lumen Gentium*, at this point, quoting some of its words: 'En tout temps et toute nation est agréable à Dieu quiconque le craint et pratique la justice. Cependant le bon vouloir de Dieu a été que les hommes ne reçoivent pas la sanctification séparément, hors de tout lien mutuel; il a voulu au contraire en faire un peuple qui le connût dans la vérité et le servît saintement' (PG 277). However, the first 'people' were the Jews. God had been forced to select another 'people', one comprising Jews and Christians, one which, if anything, is even more 'chosen'. He quoted from *Lumen Gentium*:

C'est pourquoi il s'est choisi Israël pour être son peuple, avec lequel il a fait alliance et qu'il a progressivement instruit, se manifestant lui-même et son dessein, dans l'histoire de ce peuple, et se l'attachant dans la sainteté. Tout cela cependant est arrivé en préparation et en figure de l'alliance nouvelle et parfaite qui serait conclue dans le Christ, et dans la pleine révélation qui serait apportée par le Verbe de Dieu lui-même fait chair [...] Cette alliance nouvelle, le Christ l'a instituée: c'est la nouvelle alliance dans son sang ; il appelle juifs et gentils pour en faire un peuple rassemblé dans l'unité, non selon la chair mais dans l'esprit, et qui soit le nouveau Peuple de Dieu (PG 278).

So, it would appear that the Jews were to be incorporated into this new 'people', and by implication, their original covenant with God must be an inferior version of the 'new and perfect covenant.' With such a statement in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* Maritain left himself wide open to (totally understandable) accusations from eminent Jews such as Klenicki that he demonstrated philosophical anti-Semitism. In his essay 'Jacques Maritain's vision of Judaism and anti-Semitism', Klenicki called him, with avowed regret, a 'metaphysical anti-Semite',<sup>53</sup> maintaining that Maritain 'continued the tradition of denying non-Catholics a role in God's design and a mission in themselves in *The Peasant of the Garonne*'.<sup>54</sup> Undeterred and doggedly determined, Maritain built on his views about the relationship between God, the Jewish people and the Catholic Church in his last work *De L'Église du Christ*. The Jews, he said, had brought suffering on themselves unconsciously by 'cet abandon à la rage des hommes [...] en ne voulant pas du Christ c'est l'abandon dont je viens de parler qu'Israël a voulu sans le savoir' (DE 268). God had permitted this to happen : 'il a laissé l'arbre d'obstination porter son fruit, mais en aimant plus que jamais Israël persécuté, et en compatissant de tout son amour à ses douleurs' (DE 269). But the love that God has for the Jews is the same as his love for the Church. In almost his very final words on the subject, Maritain again united Jews and Christians by saying that the olive tree of Israel and the Christian cross of redemption 'ne feront qu'une seule croix, pour offrir le salut aux hommes de toute la terre' (DE 289).

## Conclusion

In the 1937 essay 'Le Mystère d'Israël', Maritain called anti-Semitism 'la peur, le mépris et la haine du peuple juif' (LM 23). This tone was one at odds with that captured in his 1921 essay, 'A Propos de la «question juive»', where, however unconsciously and

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<sup>53</sup> Klenicki, *Jacques Maritain and the Jews*, p.73.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

however in line with the views of that time that advocated, more than ever, the assimilation of all people in France, he had stereotyped Jews and had declared that they must demonstrate loyalty to their home country or go elsewhere (a theme echoed in 1926 when he said : 'Je ne pense pas qu'avant sa réintégration dans le Christ, Israël cesse de porter le signe de la colère, puisse vivre parmi les nations sans être opprimé par elles ou sans les opprimer, asservir ou être asservi'<sup>55</sup>). By 1970, in his final work, Maritain felt able to redeem the Catholic Church and proclaimed that 'l'antisémitisme religieux qui a longtemps souillé la chrétienté a décidément disparu' (DE 281), although he was sure that racial anti-Semitism still existed, making the rather startling statement that this was in part due to jealousy of the greater intelligence of the Jews, which was feared by non-Jews. In his view, for all the terror of the death camps of the Second World War, these camps had at least led to history granting 'enfin une chance au rêve de ce retour en la terre de promission' (DE 283).

However, while Maritain may have been troubled by what he saw as the residue of anti-Semitism in the Church and attempted to assuage this in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, his 'testament', by firstly describing how all men had God's grace and secondly by linking Catholicism and Judaism, he achieved only partial success. By insisting on the correctness of the Church's dogma and through his declaration that all non-Christians must, ultimately, convert to Catholicism, his crusade against anti-Semitism and his demonstration of love and acceptance of the non-Christian as an individual along with tolerance of non-Christian faiths in a pluralist society, did not always have the desired impact. His highlighting of the similarities in the two faiths might have smoothed out the rough edges to some extent, but at the same time it attacked the foundations of the legitimacy of another faith. Ultimately, Maritain's writings on non-Christians, including

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<sup>55</sup> Maritain, *Réponse à Jean Cocteau*, p.333.

the Jews, were, in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, very much in line with his earlier writings. More than anything else they give a very clear picture of the tension at the core of 'l'esprit dur et le coeur doux'. The conversion of the Jews was, to him, the ultimate blessing. Therefore, even if anti-Semitism were eradicated, Maritain would have still held this same view of the spiritual aspect of relations with the Jews. Little wonder that Klenicki commented that although he respected the rights of Jews as citizens, he denied the Jewish person as a covenantal partner of God.<sup>56</sup> Maritain's theological position in respect of the Jews, derived from St Paul and St Thomas, and his steadfast adherence to the concept of the 'mystery' of Israel, has left him open, quite legitimately, to accusations of deeply ingrained philosophical anti-Semitism, despite the extensive work he did for the social and political rights of Jews, and for which he has been honoured in France and lauded across the world.

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<sup>56</sup> Klenicki, *Jacques Maritain and the Jews*, p.88.



## Chapter Four: Maritain's place in the debate on 'la question juive'

### Introduction

Chapter Three examined Maritain's works on the Jews and Judaism, and demonstrated how his philosophy, previously explored in Chapters One and Two, underpinned and coloured his writings on these subjects. It showed that he was able to produce a mosaic which accommodated not only his philosemitism but also his firm belief that, in spiritual matters, the Jew was an unfulfilled Christian. Chapter Four places Maritain in a broader context by comparing and contrasting his work with that of two influential contemporary figures, Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas. After the examination of key works, Sartre's *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* and Levinas's *Le Temps et l'autre*, which show their respective philosophical positions, the chapter will examine Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive* and Levinas's *Difficile Liberté, Essais sur le judaïsme*, which explore how these philosophies impacted on their writings about the Jews, Judaism and 'la question juive'. Their positions will be compared with Maritain's own to assess and establish the similarities and differences and, ultimately, to evaluate Maritain's place in the debate. As part of this process material will be gathered to help address a key question, which will be explored further in Chapters Five and Six; what has led to both Sartre and Levinas still being widely read and admired for their work in France, while Maritain, although highly influential in his day and still enjoying a warm reception in the Americas, has found himself almost forgotten in his homeland?

### A particular moment in time: post-war France as backdrop for 'la question juive'

The majority of the works examined in this chapter were written in the fast-moving days of recently liberated post-war France. The Fourth Republic, instituted in 1946 after the

fraught departure of de Gaulle, was characterised politically by fragmentation, constantly shifting short-term governments and indifference on the part of the electorate: as Knapp and Wright comment, in the final year of the Republic caretaker governments ruled for one day in every four.<sup>1</sup> Strong leadership, centralist or otherwise, was conspicuous by its absence in mainland France, yet it often emerged in brutally uncontrolled ways in its overseas territories, where the motherland, even while waging war, was forced to come to terms with the painful process of negotiation with its territories and the ultimate acceptance of their independence. Socially, although individual material prosperity began to increase at the end of the 1940s, the immediate post war years were characterised by hardship and grinding poverty. In this world of uncertainties, church attendance was dropping. Moreover, France was dealing with its own Nazi collaborators and administrators of the Vichy government. The 'Épuration légale', which swung into motion in 1944 and resonated through the years afterwards, ensured jostling and repositioning in all levels of society, including the intellectual élite. Even Sartre was not immune. Essays such as 'La République du silence', written in the early days of liberation and reconstruction, showed him opportune and eager to position his philosophy in the newly minted world of a united and heroic France with an everyman who 'contre les oppresseurs, entreprenait d'être-lui même, irrémédiablement et en se choisissant lui-même dans sa liberté, choisissait la liberté de tous'.<sup>2</sup> Retribution against those deemed to have collaborated often involved severe violence, although those with the necessary financial resources and wits could sometimes find their way out of trouble. All in all, a keenness of survival instincts was vital in a period characterised by the necessity for self-protection. Finding any surplus mental capacity and energy in which to house any desire to reach out to help others in the way of the

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<sup>1</sup> Knapp and Wright, *The Government and Politics of France*, p.50.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'La République du silence' in *Situations III* (Paris : Gallimard, 1949), p. 14.

democratic ideal of the First Republic and the principles of the Enlightenment was something almost beyond contemplation. The social and political blueprint that Maritain had laid out in *Humanisme intégral* seemed remote and the theological debate of *Primauté du Spirituel* appeared even less relevant. Speculative philosophy was a luxury few could afford. It is of little surprise that on his return to France in 1961 shortly after the demise of the Fourth Republic, Maritain found himself to be someone of so little significance to his countrymen. On the other hand the existentialism of Sartre, which had found a favourable reception in this environment, had taken firm root.

### **Existentialism: comparing and contrasting Maritain and Sartre**

From the 1930s onwards, as existentialism caught the mood of the times, Maritain never wavered from asserting that Thomism was the true form of existentialism and that all other forms were corrupt. His efforts peaked with the publication, in 1947, of *Court traité*. Sartre for his part claimed in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* that he had chosen a platform from which he could respond to the wide range of criticisms of (his form of) existentialism.<sup>3</sup> There were two broad camps of such criticism against which he felt the need to fight. One housed the accusation, made for the most part by communists, that existentialism left man in such a state of despair that he gave up on action altogether and closed in on himself in a 'bourgeois' cocoon of self-contemplation. The second, raised largely by Catholics, was that existentialism underlined only that which was ugly and sordid in human nature at the expense of highlighting the beautiful and the luminous. Sartre's form of existentialism stood accused of contempt for the reality and seriousness of God's commandments. This second camp also claimed that because no absolute, eternal values existed in Sartre's philosophy, man, freed from the

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris : Les Edition Nagel, 1970), p.9.

censure of his fellows who were also adrift with no firm moral platform, was able to do exactly as he pleased. Sartre chose to counter both forms of attack by positioning existentialism as a doctrine that, far from damning and belittling man, celebrated the subjectivity of the human viewpoint and thus showed the richness of human life.<sup>4</sup> He took pains to distinguish it from naturalism, with which he felt it had been often confused and which, he maintained, presumed that man was intrinsically bad and had to be kept in check by social structures in order to prevent the breakout of anarchy. Existentialism, by contrast, did not hold man in such contempt.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, instead of existentialism epitomising a philosophy of despair as its opponents claimed, Sartre presented it as the exact opposite: a philosophy that liberated the human being. In post-war France, where every man had little choice but to protect himself and his own through personal endeavours, such a world view legitimised this individualism and made it almost nobly heroic.

So what of Maritain's concept of existentialism: how did this fare in such a fragmented society and how did it compare and contrast with Sartre's version? As we saw in Chapter One, in philosophical terms Maritain, like Sartre, held steadfastly to the core tenet of the existentialist 'school': that existence preceded essence. Also like Sartre, although certainly not to the same degree, Maritain stated that man is defined by his acts. David Jopling comments that Sartre saw man as free to choose who he is and to lay out the 'ground plan' of his life, taking into account only a very few determinants which arise from the constraints of the human condition.<sup>6</sup> Maritain, on the other hand, viewed man as having a more prescribed path to tread. Like Sartre, Maritain believed

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<sup>4</sup> Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, p.15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>6</sup> David A. Jopling 'Sartre's moral psychology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. Christina Howells, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.103-139 (p.105).

that man was essentially free and could assimilate the external into himself. Furthermore, they shared some common ground in moral issues. Finally and perhaps most crucially, Maritain, like Sartre, regarded existentialism as a form of humanism. Sartre believed that this was possible because man, in making choices about his own life, made a choice for all men (the quotation earlier in this chapter from 'La République du silence' illustrates this point). Therefore, the individual creates an image of the universal man each and every time he acts. Rather than this providing an excuse for total selfishness, Sartre maintained that this in fact placed a huge burden of responsibility on man who had to be mindful at all times of this obligation and not act with irresponsible caprice.<sup>7</sup> In apportioning this duty to man, Sartre presented his most powerful argument to counter both the Marxists, who accused him of condemning man to a life of bourgeois disengagement, and the Christians, who challenged the apparent nihilism of existentialism.

While it can be seen that there are indisputable similarities between Sartre's and Maritain's versions of existentialism there are far more differences. Maritain maintained that man brought an external, objective reality into his own interior world. Sartre insisted that there was no such thing as an external reality to bring in or to ignore. He claimed that what lay outside man's consciousness was merely a set of probabilities and possibilities and that it was intersubjectivity, rather than any pre-existing reality, that gave man his concept of himself. This fundamental difference placed Maritain's philosophy squarely at odds with Sartre's. Furthermore there was the most yawning chasm of all between the two schools of existentialism (Christian and atheist) to consider: the presence (or absence) of God. The debate about the nature and parameters of existentialism is brought to vivid life by the documented discussion

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<sup>7</sup>Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, p.25.

between figures such as Levinas and Marcel contained in Jean Wahl's *Esquisse pour une histoire de "L'Existentialisme"*.<sup>8</sup> Sartre concluded that, even despite man's best efforts to replace God with other types of authority, any form of a priori morality was impossible. By extension, if man invented himself continually by his actions and was nothing but the sum of what he actually did, then it was only after the event, not before it, that he could be judged. This conclusion was one that was likely to chime very well with the mood of fragmentation in France at the time. Even if Sartre conceded that there was a 'human condition' whereby man, through some kind of universal shorthand which is updated for the contemporary setting he found himself in, was able to see things in a similar way to all other men, meaning that he did not need to continually re-construct every single minute aspect of reality,<sup>9</sup> he was still very far away from Maritain's position. Moreover, Sartre's rejection of any form of human 'essence', even one subservient to the superiority of the human act, led Maritain, as noted in Chapter One, to call Sartre's version of existentialism 'apocryphal', because it denigrated human intellect and intuition and led, ultimately, to the destruction of being itself. Even God has an 'essence', said Maritain, and this essence was reflected in the essence of man (and in that of every living creature), giving man his inherent dignity. So-called existentialists who did not subscribe to this view closed themselves off, in Maritain's view, from the very meaning of true being.

Having examined Sartre's and Maritain's differing versions of existentialism (and their likely reception in post-war France), the next question to consider is how these positions shaped the backdrop to each man's consideration of 'la question juive', starting with Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive*, which Jonathan Judaken refers to

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<sup>8</sup> Jean Wahl, *Esquisse pour une histoire de «L'Existentialisme»* (Paris : L'Arche, 1949).

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, p.70.

as the 'Ur-text' for the debate on 'the Jewish question' and the yardstick against French post-war writers 'determined their own stance on the issues'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sartre : Réflexions sur la question juive**

In *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Sartre famously asserted that the anti-Semite was predisposed to his anti-Semitism ('Si le Juif n'existait pas, l'antisémite l'inventerait'<sup>11</sup>) because he had an 'a priori' concept of the Jews, which involved the definition of a Jewish 'essence'. Immediately, this placed the anti-Semite, in Sartrean terms, in a position of inauthenticity. His descent into 'mauvaise foi' became even more profound because of the illogical 'passion' which the anti-Semite directed against the Jew, a passion that led ultimately to 'une France occulte et conservatrice',<sup>12</sup> a country closely bound to the revival of mythical peasant values in the 1930s and 1940s (and a concept much loved by the Vichy government which felt these values represented the instinctive spirit of the 'real' France, as shown in its proposed re-writing of the Republican 'devise' of 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité' to read 'Travail, Famille, Patrie'). According to Rhiannon Goldthorpe Sartre viewed the hysterical passion of the anti-Semite as the means which allowed him, threatened by the presence of the Jew, to claim that he was carried away and thus could opt out of taking personal responsibility for his actions. He was then able to deceive himself that the world was that which it was not, a world which had been good originally and would be good again if only it were rescued from the evil clutches of the Jew.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Judaken, 'Interrogations, Jewish Speculations, Spectres Juifs' (on website of the University of Southern California, March 2014) <http://www.usc.edu/dept/comp-lit/tympanum/4/judaken.html> no page numbers [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2014].

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris : Editions Gallimard, [1946] 1954), p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.60.

<sup>13</sup> Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *Sartre: Literature & Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.64.

Sartre's critical point about man choosing for all men when he acts is extended directly to the anti-Semite. Locked in the straight jacket of his passion, he has 'la peur devant la condition humaine'<sup>14</sup> and makes a free choice of a general attitude 'non seulement vis-à-vis des Juifs, mais vis-à-vis des hommes en général, de l'histoire et de la société; c'est à la fois une passion et une conception du monde'.<sup>15</sup> Such overt links to his philosophy of course have contributed to an argument made many times that Sartre was less interested in the Jews and anti-Semitism and more concerned with talking about man in general and the intellectual in particular. This viewpoint is strengthened by other claims made by Sartre, for example, the fact that the anti-Semite needs to find a convenient scapegoat in Jewish 'evil' to provide protection from the terrifying realisation that life could sour in an arbitrary and illogical way and that the anti-Semite welcomes states of crises, such as that caused by the Dreyfus affair, because they allow him to join together with others in a 'primitive', emotional and physical way. As Sarah Hammerschlag comments: 'what is relevant [...] is that, for Sartre, being Jewish represents an intensification of the experience of *being human*' (her italics).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the anti-Semite rather than the Jew became the focus of the work; a shadow portrait in which Sartre denied the Jew his or her own identity; 'Le Juif est un homme que les autres hommes tiennent pour Juif'.<sup>17</sup> He compounded this statement by adding that the only thing that united Jews was the hatred that other men felt for them.<sup>18</sup> The portrait of the anti-Semite became a stalking horse for all that Sartre was seeking to distance himself from- the underlying beliefs of the National Revolution of the Vichy state, whose factions, while disagreeing on many things, were united in both their opposition to what

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<sup>14</sup> Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p.64.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p.88.

<sup>17</sup> Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p.83.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.111.



they perceived as Jewish decadence and also in their belief in the 'real', intuitive legends of fantasy about France, lore that even a Jew born in France could never hope to understand at an instinctive level.

One thing that Sartre and Maritain had in common is the fact that both described the ties that they felt bound the French together. However, while Sartre talked about them in negative terms, Maritain wrote about them more positively. Sartre depicted anti-Semitism as something that had given an emotional underpinning of unity to Vichy France while Maritain, although squarely laying the blame for France's treatment of its Jews at the feet of the Vichy administration, stated more than once that the French people as a whole, even under the Vichy administration, was incapable of anti-Semitism, as it was not in its nature; a national character which, like Sartre, he believed was concerned primarily with reason, rather than with illogical emotion (although he also talked about the 'soul' of France in his wartime broadcasts such as *A travers le désastre* as we saw in Chapter Three). Sartre appeared to see any tendency towards 'groupthink' as negative. This seemed to catch the mood of post-war France in a deeper and more permanent sense than Maritain's communal emotional positivity.

For Sartre, there was irony in that 'Frenchness', which the Jews could never, allegedly, possess (even if the actual idea of a communal 'Frenchness' was something to be deplored) was manifested in the symbols of the middle class, a class despised by Sartre, yet, ironically, the very class to which many Jews belonged. Here one can see an intersection in the beliefs of Sartre and Maritain. Sartre maintained that anti-Semitism found most support among members of the 'petite bourgeoisie' and small-minded officials, who had very little that they could call their own and who, in accusing the Jew of 'stealing' something from them, were able to console themselves that they must

actually have something worth stealing in the first place. This need to debase others in order to feel good, because one really has nothing, led Sartre to call anti-Semitism 'un snobisme du pauvre'<sup>19</sup> a movement which, he claimed, found its strongest support, in both France and Germany, in the lower middle classes. Therefore, Sartre made a case for painting anti-Semitism as a class issue, claiming, rather implausibly, that one found it rarely among the working classes. Cunning enough to know where the locus of anti-Semitism lay, the Nazis, said Sartre, had no choice but to position the 'evil' of the Jews as a form of capitalism in order to rouse the workers into the state of anti-semitic passion that they were incapable of feeling naturally (Sartre surely writes lazily here in attributing an 'a priori' tendency on the part of the working class against anti-Semitism). Maritain in turn agreed with Sartre that the authorities could wilfully ignore genuine and fundamental social problems by selecting the Jew as the convenient scapegoat for national problems. However, unlike Sartre, Maritain never criticised capitalism, only the evil of materialism and as Chapter three showed he even went so far as to state that the Jews felt most at home in a capitalist society.<sup>20</sup>

So is it fair to say that Sartre used the Jew as a puppet representation of the general destiny of man, opportunistically presenting him to illustrate an academic exercise? Certainly, there is evidence that Sartre wrote *Réflexions sur la question juive* very quickly and drew heavily from his earlier works. The accusation rings most true when one looks at his portraits of the 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' Jew and the democrat where many general points emerge. The democrat, with a misplaced logic gained from the principles of the French Revolution, which had been swept aside by the war, upheld the principle of free speech which had allowed the anti-Semite to put

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>20</sup> Maritain, *Antisemitism*, p.9.

forward his views in the first place. Judaken, along with many others, highlights the general shortcomings of the spirit of the Revolution, especially in the face of virulent anti-Semitism, commenting that 'what is different about the postwar reflections on "the Jewish Question" is a critique of the Enlightenment and the politics of emancipation', and that it was, he says, Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive* that pointed to this fundamental difference.<sup>21</sup> Sartre actually equated the democrat and the anti-Semite. The former was desperate, he said, for the Jew to assimilate himself into society and to smooth out his differences. Therefore, the anti-Semite wanted to destroy the 'man' and retain only the Jew, while the democrat wished to destroy the 'Jew' and retain only the man. Neither 'enemy' accepted the whole person. Moreover, the 'inauthentic' Jew, who longed to 'fit in', actually found common ground with both the anti-Semite and the democrat. A key characteristic of the 'inauthentic' Jew was his attraction to the impersonalism of rationalism. Taking this point to extremes, Sartre even claimed that the Jew's alleged attachment to money arose from its abstract representation of the objective and universal. Yet even by touching on this stereotype, Sartre had to be evoking it and he was criticized soundly by many readers (for this and many other things).<sup>22</sup> But even the inauthentic Jew was good for society, said Sartre. Like Maritain, he called Jews a 'levain de cette société'.<sup>23</sup> And, also like Maritain, he painted a picture of a society of 'concrete liberalism' or pluralism where people would be accepted as citizens despite their differences, whatever these may be, race included. However, unlike Maritain, Sartre conceded this had to be an impossible dream in the face of the anti-semitic attachment to the irrational and the mystical where the man-made jurisdiction of the land held no sway; although significant steps towards this ideal could

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<sup>21</sup> Judaken, 'Interrogations, Jewish Speculations, Spectres Juifs', no page number.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006), p.242.

<sup>23</sup> Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p.177.

still be taken if the class system were to vanish because 'l'antisémitisme est une représentation mythique et bourgeoise de la lutte des classes et qu'il ne saurait exister dans une société sans classes'.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it was the petrified class system that helped ensure that men of all classes turned, with one voice, against outsiders. As Hammerschlag comments, anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century had proven itself to be 'one of the most successful methods of national unification'<sup>25</sup> and this rallying call against the Jews was to continue well past this particular point in French history.

### **Sartre and Maritain: different viewpoints but the same critical reaction to both?**

Despite their many differences, Sartre and Maritain were united by the vision of a pluralist, liberal society, free from anti-Semitism, despite this being something that was very difficult to see in post-war France with lingering wide-scale resentment of Jews, fuelled by property disputes. One further thing that they had in common was the criticism levied at both for their portrayal of the Jewish people. Each presented the Jew as a suffering and sacrificial figure; Sartre, for example, stated that for the Jew to be seen as 'authentic' he had to take upon himself the 'martyrdom' and 'tire[r] son orgueil de son humiliation'.<sup>26</sup> As such, according to Judaken, the Jew, as a figure of negativity, assumed a positive identity only as a universalizing revolutionary.<sup>27</sup> If Sartre really was guilty as many claimed of using the Jews as little more than an outlet for the demonstration of his theories of the human condition he was perhaps not so far removed from the position he created for his own democrat, whom he had criticised so sharply. Judaken states that although Sartre's works on the Jewish question formed only

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.181.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>27</sup> Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, p.127.

a small part of his overall output (as was also the case with Maritain): 'at each defining moment of his intellectual agenda Sartre turned to the image of "the Jew" to either clarify, reassess, or redefine his ideas'.<sup>28</sup>

There were also suspicions around Sartre's opportunism in highlighting the plight of a particular section of humanity at a time, during the closing months of the Second World War, when the treatment of this group was in the spotlight, especially with the struggles in Palestine and the eventual establishment of the state of Israel. Sartre stated that the French Jew should not feel pressured into either staying in France or moving to Israel as both were valid choices, and if the Jew decided to stay in France 'la Palestine pourrait [...] représenter à ses yeux une sorte de valeur idéale, un symbole'.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, Sartre believed that a militant struggle to set up and protect the state of Israel was perfectly justified. Judaken writes that many of his students at that time went beyond the words of their mentor and took action. Robert Misrahi is probably the best-known and Sartre even gave him a character reference at his trial for concealing explosives.<sup>30</sup>

The furore which arose from Sartre's (perhaps) self-serving portrayal of the Jew was fanned by his alleged comment near the end of his life that, instead of describing the Jew in *Réflexions sur la question juive*, he was, in fact, describing himself: <sup>31</sup> an intellectual with few material possessions (furthermore, during this interview with Benny Lévy he talked, apparently, of the sufferings of the Jew, and how this equates to the persecution of others on the fringe of society, the Jew's revolutionary purpose, the relationship of both Jew and Christian to God and to one another and the Jew's

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>29</sup> Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p.170.

<sup>30</sup> Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, p.188.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre and Benny Lévy, *L'espoir maintenant: les entretiens de 1980* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1991), p.74.

messianic destiny).<sup>32</sup> It is only a short pace from this position (if reported correctly, and there are many who contest furiously the authenticity of these interviews, including Simone de Beauvoir) to Bloy's portrayal of the tortured Jew and a further small step to Maritain's equating of the suffering of the Jewish people with that of Christ on the cross. Much criticism arose from Sartre's description of the Jew as a person seen and defined only through the eyes of the anti-Semite. Through the absence of any meaningful discussion of the Jews as a people, Sartre was accused of disregarding their long history and tradition. In doing so he fell into the same trap as many others of a socially liberal disposition, men like his own democrat, people who had been inspired by the Revolution's creed and who, in treating the Jew just as any other man who was able to access the liberties open to all, denied him his right to Jewishness. Furthermore, by treating the Jew as a kind of wanderer and thus the polar opposite of bourgeois respectability and stability, Sartre stood accused of denying the Jewish people its character. Judaken comments that early Jewish reviews of the work were keenly divided. Some critics praised Sartre's position of crusader in the face of virulent anti-Semitism while others attacked fiercely his apparent lack of awareness of Jewish history and culture.<sup>33</sup> His tendency towards opportunism is highlighted by Susan Suleiman who comments that Sartre's presentation of the Jew emerged very late in the works he produced during the war. Although he mentioned the Jews in passing in his essay 'La République du silence', including them in the vast sweep of united French men,<sup>34</sup> he barely mentioned them or their fate in the essays he wrote about French life under the German occupation immediately before the publication of *Réflexions sur la question*

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>33</sup> Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, p.256.

<sup>34</sup> Sartre, 'La République du silence', p.11.

*juive*.<sup>35</sup> However, to be fair, neither did anyone else, apart from Maritain. As Suleiman comments, Sartre placed the Jew alongside other French groups in a grand unifying 'nous' which opposed Nazism, using a rhetoric that was not so far removed from that of de Gaulle (and Maritain's own words in exile). Sartre was at pains, claims Suleiman, not to spoil 'the homogenous picture of French suffering' that he 'sought to paint for his English-speaking readers',<sup>36</sup> readers he seemed keen to woo and perhaps even ingratiate himself with. While acknowledging the claim that his critics made of his portrait of an almost universally heroic France (that it was a calculated move on his part to gain a prominent place in literary circles), Suleiman interprets his motive more charitably, attributing it to the more noble desire to help create a version of events that would comfort, reassure and inspire those who had lived through them. The benefits of a 'worldwide celebrity' that arose from this picture of 'democratic heroism' were nothing but the by-product of such a desire, she maintains.<sup>37</sup>

Maritain's presentation of the Jew faced, as we have seen, a similar reception to that of Sartre: praised and condemned in equal measure. However, the difference in each man's reaction is very telling. Sartre became aware very quickly of the flavour of potentially stereotypical anti-Semitism he had presented in *Réflexions sur la question juive* (he had even given a description of certain 'Jewish' facial characteristics). And so he changed tack. The flexibility of this turnaround was demonstrated clearly in the lecture he gave to the influential 'Ligue française pour une Palestine libre' in 1947 (attended by Levinas), just three years after the book's publication, where he went to great lengths to present a definable Jewish cultural identity, and faced and attempted to

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<sup>35</sup> Susan Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.26.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.22.

resolve many of the issues that his Jewish readers had objected to. Unlike Maritain who maintained throughout his life that he could and would contemplate the Jews only through the eyes of a Christian, Sartre acknowledged that his own ingrained perspective, caused in part by his Christian upbringing, had unbalanced the way he saw the Jew. As Judaken comments, Sartre had written the book quickly (opportunistically or for other reasons entirely), had done very little in the way of concrete research before writing and knew very few Jews personally.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps it was inevitable that there would be gaps in his presentation. In later life, Sartre himself criticised the way he had presented the issues. He claimed that although he had understood the individual Jew's perception of himself as a Jew (which he calls 'judéité'), he had failed to appreciate Jewish being and culture as a whole (which he refers to as 'judaïcité'). Thus we can see that Sartre and Maritain enjoyed (or not) the same mixture of praise and criticism for their similarly pitched portrayal of the subject; praise for their fierce opposition to anti-Semitism and for their philosemitism at a time when it was difficult and dangerous to voice these views, and criticism for their apparent ignorance and their dismissal of the character of the Jew (as a Jew) and of the Jewish people as a whole. Yet while both expressed some regret for their earlier output, Sartre went far further than Maritain, openly acknowledging that his perspective had not been without bias. Furthermore he never tried to suppress his work. As we have seen, Maritain actively excluded at least one early-career essay from his definitive collection of works on 'la question juive'. One might conclude that Sartre was better able to reflect critically on his own works, to read the mood of his readership better, to adapt and then to atone for any errors of judgment, real or perceived. Maritain might be able to read the mood (otherwise why

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<sup>38</sup> Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question*, p.127.



try and suppress his own work?) but never wavered from asserting that his position was the correct one.

### **Comparing Maritain with Mauriac**

Before turning to examine the work of Levinas and to explore how this compares with that of Maritain, it is worth considering the position of Mauriac, another contemporary (and friend) of Maritain's. He shared Maritain's desire to link anti-Semitism with Christophobia and thus to prove the close link between Judaism and Christianity. A striking example is to be found in the foreword Mauriac wrote to Elie Wiesel's iconic *La Nuit*. It appears probable that Maritain himself was approached to take on the task of writing a foreword by the young Wiesel but that he declined, for reasons unknown (of course in 1958 he was far away and removed from the memories of European trauma in his professorship at Princeton). Mauriac, on the other hand, moved by a conversation he had in Paris with Wiesel (the young man who had lost his faith in God and looked at him, Mauriac, with 'ce regard d'un Lazare ressuscité'<sup>39</sup>), took on the task and received plaudits for doing so. Commenting (as did many others) that the deportation of Jewish children from France marked the end of the dream of both the Enlightenment and of scientific progress, Mauriac built up to a comparison of Jewish suffering to that of Christ, with words which could have easily come from the pen of Maritain himself:

Que lui ai-je dit? Lui ai-je parlé de cet Israélien, ce frère qui lui ressemblait peut-être, ce crucifié dont la croix a vaincu le monde ? Lui ai-je affirmé que ce qui fut pour lui pierre d'achoppement est devenu pierre d'angle pour moi et que la

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<sup>39</sup> François Mauriac in the foreword to Elie Wiesel's *La Nuit* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1958/2007), p.28.

conformité entre la croix et la souffrance des hommes demeure à mes yeux la  
clef de ce mystère insondable où sa foi d'enfant s'est perdue? <sup>40</sup>

According to Crane and as we saw in Chapter Three Maritain was also asked to write the preface to Poliakov's *Bréviaire de la Haine* but, despite being moved deeply by the book's content, he declined because of what he deemed to be subjective and superficial criticism of the Pope and Catholics who had tried to help the Jews. This task too was taken on by Mauriac. Maritain introduced a distinction which he later refined and moved to the foreground in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*: that of the fundamental difference between the Church eternal and its temporary incarnation. He claimed that Poliakov confused the two.<sup>41</sup> Mauriac shared many views with Maritain but he did not subscribe to such a scrupulous division of the Church's eternal body from the everyday business of its members and had no qualms about endorsing Poliakov's work. Finally, as we saw in Chapter Two Mauriac encouraged Maritain to write *Le Paysan de la Garonne* but stayed behind the scenes when controversy beckoned. Like Sartre, Mauriac appeared to have a keen sense of public opinion and the ability to flex his approach to meet expectations if the case demanded it. Maritain did not appear to share these qualities or if he did he overcame them with dogmatic loyalty to the Papacy and 'the truth'.

### **Influences on Levinas's philosophy**

The chapter now turns to an examination of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, a near contemporary of Maritain's.

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<sup>40</sup> Mauriac's preface to *La Nuit*, p.30.

<sup>41</sup> See Richard Crane "Heart-Rending Ambivalence", p.12.

Levinas studied in Freiburg in the late 1920s under firstly Husserl and then Heidegger, during the period when the former was handing over the mantle of his professorship to the latter. Like many other students, Levinas fell under the influence of the charismatic Heidegger, a spell that was broken abruptly and traumatically in 1933 when Heidegger declared, apparently out of the blue, his allegiance to Nazism. Although Levinas's widely-acknowledged masterpiece, *Totalité et infini*, was published decades later in 1961, Samuel Moyn claims that the foundations of the philosophy it contains were laid during Levinas's student days and, thus, that any reading of it needs to take Heidegger's influence onto account.<sup>42</sup> Whether or not this is somewhat fanciful, given the strength of Levinas's attachment to Heidegger at the time, the influence of the latter perhaps did infiltrate this philosophical foundation; even if Levinas were to spend the rest of his life expressing a vigorous and principled rejection of his former teacher's ontology.

Before his postgraduate studies in Freiburg, Levinas studied at Strasbourg, which in the 1920s was only recently emancipated from German rule and had (re)embraced with eager zeal the Cartesian tradition that had dominated French philosophy for so long. Yet, in tune with the spirit of exuberant optimism that abounded in Alsace at that time, this retrospective return to roots was balanced with youthful energy and openness to new ideas. Cartesianism is, of course, completely at odds with realist philosophies such as those espoused by the Thomists, and Chapter One examined Maritain's contempt for it, a tradition which he, too, had grown up with, albeit a generation before Levinas. Chapter One also examined the depth of Maritain's enduring affection for his tutor Bergson even though he chose to break ties. This deep regard is something he had

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<sup>42</sup> Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p.4.

in common with Levinas. Bergson had presented a challenge to the Cartesian establishment with his theory of intuition and had given insights into the infinity and fluidity of both the individual and of things (although insights into other people and into general ethics were thinner on the ground). Phenomenology, which Levinas studied at Freiburg under Husserl and Heidegger, was viewed by some, including Jean Hering who introduced Levinas to it, as a kind of a hopeful fulfilment of Bergsonianism. In its examination of how the human mind perceives objects which are external to it, phenomenology is at odds with both positivism (which builds philosophy up from the empirical study of external objects), and also with Cartesianism (which holds that such objects do not exist at all). Hopes for phenomenology included the wish that it could be the philosophy that established the presence of God. Some aspirants, including Sartre, saw phenomenology as providing the possibility of unlocking the prison of the self and allowing access to the world of objects outside it; a world that included nature, which could be appreciated in a new richness and depth not accessible through the static and sterile lens of positivism.

For Levinas, part of Heidegger's appeal was that he seemed to blend together Husserl and Bergson, both of whom he admired greatly. Heidegger's concept of 'Mitsein' positioned the individual firmly in the world and thus broke with both Cartesianism and also with Husserl. In 'Dasein', Heidegger's phrase for the individual's presence in the world, the person is inextricably caught up with others, has a 'concern' for his fellow man and does not and cannot stand alone. After Heidegger's association with the Nazi party, people tried, retrospectively, to determine whether Heidegger's philosophy was linked to Nazism, and also, crucially, whether they had, in some way, been complicit in supporting Nazism through their own devotion to the philosopher. Levinas wrote that Nazism forged the ultimate break with idealism, because it planted man firmly in his

surrounding context and in the physical to such an extent that, ultimately, it would lead to biological racism, for example the idea of tainted blood.<sup>43</sup> Heidegger's rejection of Husserl's version of idealism, therefore, could be read as having links with Nazism, even if in describing 'Mitsein' Heidegger never actually made any overt link to the physical and thence, by extrapolation, to racism. Nonetheless, even if an unsavoury link between Heidegger's philosophy and Nazism could be proven, Levinas, along with many of his contemporaries, still viewed Heidegger's phenomenology as worthy of respect; firstly, because it played a large part in putting an end to both the idealism and also the positivism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and secondly, because there was still hope of taking it up, expunging its tainted connotations and re-positioning it as a way forward. As Moyn puts it: '[t]he only way *out* of Heideggerianism seemed to be *through* it' (his italics).<sup>44</sup>

One of Levinas's many contributions to philosophy is his work on intersubjectivity and the concept of 'the other' or, as Moyn puts it, 'how to conceptualize human multiplicity'.<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*, argued that society does not comprise the acts of individuals, but, in fact, predates them, and with this assertion he challenged the basis of modern philosophy at root level (the Christian belief in individual choice). He insisted too that philosophy should be totally secular and divorced from theology thus ironically, finding common ground with the Thomists, who while, naturally, rejecting secularism also advocated, for reasons already discussed in Chapter One, the decoupling of theology and philosophy. This strip of common ground is narrow because, unlike the Thomists whose theology provided an ethical framework for their philosophy, Heidegger's secular philosophy left the question of ethics wide open. It

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<sup>43</sup> 'Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'Hitlérisme', *Esprit*, no.26 (1934) no page numbers.

<sup>44</sup> Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, p.104.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

was this formlessness of ethics that was picked up and developed by Levinas in his theory of intersubjectivity, which, whilst also secular, redrew phenomenology. It also took inspiration from his own Jewish roots, although the transcendent 'other' to whom ethical obedience is owed is extracted from any religious dogma in which it was bound up. Levinas's conclusion to these difficult deliberations appeared to be an acknowledgement of both the existence of 'Dasein' and at the same time, a need on the part of man to attempt an escape from it. However, when such attempts to escape, which could take many forms, met with failure (which they always did) man would feel only shame and disgust.

Levinas viewed theology as something that could provide one of the means of escape from 'Dasein'. Moyn maintains that Levinas drew inspiration from the German-Jewish theologian Rosenzweig, who laid stress on the absolute difference between God and man and the importance of love in bridging the gap; a distinction that he claimed had been lost during the times of nineteenth century positivism, when man himself became godlike (in this belief, Rosenzweig's views have much in common with Maritain's outlook on true humanism and his criticism of its false forms). Besides Rosenzweig Levinas also appeared to draw inspiration from Jean Wahl, whom he met in Freiburg in the late 1920s when Wahl, too, was a disciple of Bergson. In the 1930s the Jewish Wahl brought Kierkegaard to prominence in Paris and raised a storm of protest by separating the latter's philosophy from his faith, thus examining 'the other' in a non-theological context. After the Second World War, Levinas combined what he had learned from Rosenzweig and Wahl with his studies of Jewish theology and developed further the concept of a secular 'other'. He immersed himself in the teachings of different forms of Judaism, gravitating in the late 1940s towards the Talmud, inspired by the enigmatic teacher Chouchani. Yet his philosophy had a broad appeal. It was not an

existentialist philosophy in so far as one understands existentialism through Sartre's works or in the way that Kierkegaard's philosophy was presented retrospectively. In fact, Levinas went so far as to distance himself from the post-war enthusiasm for Parisian existentialism and stated that Kierkegaard had been resurrected as a result only of Heidegger's philosophy. He distinguished his thoughts most clearly from existentialism when he said, talking of the relationship with the other: 'J'espère pouvoir montrer cette relation comme entièrement différente de ce qu'on nous propose tant du côté existentialiste que du cote marxiste'.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Le temps et l'autre : Levinas's philosophy***

*Le temps et l'autre* was published in 1948 and so was a close contemporary of both Sartre's *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* and Maritain's *Court traité*. It was first delivered as a series of lectures in 1946 and 1947 at the Collège Philosophique founded by Wahl in Paris. The text contained many of Levinas's key ideas, which would be developed progressively, culminating in his mature works, such as *Totalité et infini*. It traced a path from an examination of 'being' without any specific embodiment (which Levinas called the 'there is'), through an exploration of various aspects of the nature of the subject or existent, which takes on 'being' through a process Levinas calls 'hypostasis', to the analysis of the relationship of the subject with the other (called by Levinas 'the mystery' of the other). Standing in stark contrast to Hegel, his ultimate conclusion was that, rather than the unity of the subject and the other being acknowledged, the difference between them was reinforced; 'Mais je ne suis pas l'Autre. Je suis tout seul' (his italics).<sup>47</sup> Time itself is connected to the other. Levinas writes of the desire of the existent to escape itself by projecting itself on to the world, a world

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<sup>46</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), p.68.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.21.

that, at least to begin with, it enjoys and in which it finds a form of 'salvation'. In the attempt to free itself (from itself), the existent also discovers that time is not just the present moment in which it is bound up, but is also something that stretches back to the past and forward to the future. However, ultimately, the existent is not able to achieve the escape it desires so badly and finds nothing but itself. It is only in death, says Levinas, that the existent truly finds the future, because death remains the ultimate 'other', a mystery, something totally beyond the subjectivity of the existent and which is completely incapable of mastery. Other existents also remain a mystery. It is in engaging with them that the future, described often by Levinas as fecundity, emerges. In the preface to the work he says:

La thèse principale entrevue dans *Le Temps et l'Autre* consiste, par contre, à penser le temps non pas comme une dégradation de l'éternité, mais comme relation à ce qui, de soi inassimilable, absolument autre, ne se laisserait pas assimiler par l'expérience ou à ce qui, de soi infini, ne se laisserait pas comprendre.<sup>48</sup>

With this theory of time, Levinas departs from the Bergsonian principle of duration, where time is composed of different and novel moments, with the implication that time is created from individual consciousness and does not bring into play the presence of the other. To Levinas, the time of the other and the time of the subject are not the same time; in fact, they interrupt one another, meaning that time is inextricably linked with the 'otherness' of the other. Yet he saw this otherness as a positive not a negative force.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.9.



The positivity arises from a morality and ethics found in dealing with the other and in the opportunity to find meaning in the relationship; for example, goodness results from positing that the other means more to me than I do myself, from taking responsibility for the other and from responding to 'it'. While the relationship with the other is paradoxical because the other can never be known nor grasped, yet it is impossible for the subject to be indifferent to it. God is another form of the other, perhaps the ultimate form, and is embodied in the very act of putting the other person before oneself. As Richard Cohen comments, this responsibility for the other person takes precedence over philosophy itself: '[t]here are obligations greater than the infinite responsibility to think and be on one's own, greater, then, than all the traditional philosophic responsibilities, greater because *better*' (his italics).<sup>49</sup> These ideas have clear links with Maritain's philosophy, especially his concept of goodness overflowing outwards from the existent and towards something or someone else, often God. They also reflect Maritain's belief in religious worship as, fundamentally, a communal activity as well as his social and political views that man has obligations to those around him.

### ***Difficile Liberté : Essais sur le judaïsme : Levinas's writings on Judaism***

*Difficile Liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* comprises a collection of essays that were written for the most part in the 1950s and 1960s, at a time when the post-war recovery and retrieval of Jewish identity was underway, and gathered together into a collection that was first published in 1963. As such, inevitable comparisons with Maritain's 1965 collection arise. However, the subject matter of Levinas's essays ranges more broadly than Maritain's, taking in topics such as philosophical viewpoints on Judaism (with reference to Hegel and Heidegger), examinations of ancient Jewish teachings,

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Cohen, Introduction to English translation of *Le temps et l'autre, Time and the Other* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p.26.

consideration of the possibilities for Jewish-Christian relations in a post Second World War context and the impact of the creation of the state of Israel.

In the essay that opens the collection, 'Ethique et esprit', Levinas examined the state of the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 1950s and commented on both its move towards affirmation of the irrational at the expense of social and ethical action and also on the Pope's hardening attitude to potential dissenters (this theme was explored in Chapter One where we saw that a wide range of figures were banned from teaching duties, with Maritain himself, it was rumoured, lucky to escape). This shift in the Church, Levinas says, had led to a feeling of emptiness in Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> Judaism, on the other hand, he saw as having once had a tight bond between its spirituality and its morality, and although lost, efforts were being made to re-establish it. Like the Catholic Church Judaism had lost its way, although the cause was different; this Levinas saw as its leanings in the nineteenth century towards the desire to resemble the main European religions. In following this path Judaism began, says Levinas, to become mediocre: 'Israël n'est pas devenu pire que le monde ambiant, quoi qu'en disent les antisémites. Mais il a cessé d'être meilleur. Le plus fort, c'est que c'était là une ambition'.<sup>51</sup> Thus, its desire to lose what made it distinctive left Judaism stranded in a no-man's land. It lost its unique character, something which Levinas described as a mix of ritual and science or 'une extrême conscience'.<sup>52</sup> Instead Judaism had chosen to join in with the then current confidence in positivism and had turned away from its less rational side, which had been housed in such things as miracles, something that Rosenzweig, for example, had been keen to revive. The surrender to positivism resulted in a very narrow lens that could not take account of the full range of different types of intelligence, and certainly could not

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<sup>50</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficile liberté : Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2010), p.17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

make the necessary links between them. As illustration, Levinas turned to the ultimate act of violence that of murder, to present reasons why it is so wrong, reasons more fundamental than its prohibition under society's code of conduct. It is in seeing the 'other' that man transcends himself, becomes conscious and mindful of those around him, and begins to grasp what really 'is'. If man is unable to see the 'other' he will never be able to move out of his own mind and instead sees those around him as things to be taken over, controlled and ultimately killed. If man views the 'other' as a being independent of himself, enjoys a relationship with this other, is conscious of that enjoyment and reflects on it, then man is on the right path to a meaningful religion, one which stands in stark contrast to any mere adherence to a social code or obedience to empty dogma. In this positioning of religion we can recognise aspects of Maritain's theology as well as links with his realist philosophy. Most notably, we can hear echoes of Maritain's 'living fire' of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, a flame that drives man towards his fellow man and God and away from the emptiness of worship of the temporal world.

In another essay from the same collection, 'Une religion d'adultes', Levinas actually quotes St Thomas phrase 'une dignité de cause',<sup>53</sup> a concept that St Thomas believed made all men, without exception, subject to God's action and force. However, during the Second World War, the Jews, said Levinas 'connurent une condition inférieure à celle des choses, une expérience de la passivité totale, une expérience de la Passion'.<sup>54</sup> Just as Mauriac and many others commented, this made nonsense of all of the rationality and logic of the age of science, and returned the Jew of the 1930s and 1940s to the position of the Jew of the Old Testament. Despite the kindness of individual Catholics and Muslims towards the Jews, this return was absolute. Thus, said Levinas,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

there was little point in considering the things that united men, such as the common core of the Abrahamic religions, when it was only the Jew who had been singled out in such a way, and who thus 'se maintient en marge de l'histoire politique du monde dont il a eu le privilège moral d'être la victime'.<sup>55</sup> So where does this return to ancient times leave the Jew? At best, through the voice of the Old Testament, he is seen as a mere precursor to what is to come. Levinas's comments at this point chimed clearly with Maritain's position: the inadequacy and irrelevance of Enlightenment philosophy, the victimhood of the Jewish people and their eventual salvation through conversion to Christianity. But having built this position, Levinas rejected it and turned to one which had far less in common with Maritain and more affinity with Sartre and, in particular, his concept of the 'authentic' Jew. Levinas, instead of presenting the Jew as an unfulfilled Christian, demonstrated a resoluteness to preserve Jewish difference. For example, instead of trying to find common ground with Christians in Bible studies, he said that Jews should instead read scripture through a Jewish lens and proclaim it orally in the 'rabbinic' and Talmudic traditions: 'Les voies qui mènent à Dieu dans ce judaïsme ne traversent pas les mêmes paysages que les voies chrétiennes'.<sup>56</sup> Yet despite this encouragement to promote difference, Levinas saw a link between Judaism and Western philosophy, as both advocated the pursuit of intellectual excellence. He conceded that the fulfilment of these endeavours, that is, 'l'affirmation rigoureuse de l'indépendance humaine, de sa présence intelligente à une réalité intelligible'<sup>57</sup> may, ultimately, lead to the path to atheism, but that this was a risk that had to be taken, because it was only through such rigours that man stood any chance of reaching the Transcendent: 'On peut se demander, en effet, si l'esprit occidental, si la philosophie,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.34.

n'est pas en dernière analyse la position d'une humanité qui accepte le risque de l'athéisme, qu'il faut courir, mais surmonter, rançon de sa majorité'.<sup>58</sup> Although Maritain, naturally, did not even hint at the possibility that man might find atheism as a result of intellectual endeavour, nevertheless one can see parallels with Maritain's assertion that it is entirely possible to touch the Transcendent if one exercises constant disciplined intellectual rigour.

Despite highlighting this apparently shared belief in the importance of such excellence, there remained for Levinas one fundamental difference between Western philosophy and Judaism: the world of ethics. Philosophy, he claimed, was ultimately self-reflexive and internally focused because each philosopher existed only for himself (and there are similarities here with Maritain's criticisms of false philosophy in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* especially of those 'ideosophes' who ignored external truth). In contrast the Jew, said Levinas, experiences the presence of God through his relations with others, his renouncing of selfish possession and, fundamentally, his recognition that self-consciousness is inseparable from a consciousness of justice for others: 'L'éthique n'est pas le corollaire de la vision de Dieu, elle est cette vision même'.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the attributes of God, for example mercy, have been given to man as a commandment and the granting of social justice by man to other men is a primary requirement because it is that which links together knowledge of God and the Jew's relationship with other men. Practice of this social justice, according to Levinas, could be nurtured through the daily discipline of ritual and self-education. Individual piety would never be enough because man must turn himself outwards (this statement is reminiscent of Maritain's insistence in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* that Catholicism is not merely concerned with private

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.37.

worship, but is also about communal prayer and celebration). The creation of a just society becomes a religious act : 'le contact avec le divin n'est pas une espèce d'*amitié spirituelle*, mais celle qui se manifeste, s'éprouve et s'accomplit sans une économie juste et dont chaque homme est pleinement responsable'.<sup>60</sup> Even God will not break this bond of responsibility between men. In order to fulfil its enormity man has to be far tougher on himself than on his fellow man. For the Jew, Levinas tell us, this principle of caring for one's fellow man is vastly more important than buildings and possessions. As it is a key part of God's plan for men to behave in this way (and only God can judge them if they fail in this duty), the Jew becomes ultra-special because of the reverence he places on fulfilling this requirement. However, as Levinas is quick to point out in the essay 'Judaïsme', the Jew must guard against excess pride in this privileged position.<sup>61</sup> This brings to mind St Paul's words as used repeatedly by Maritain: excessive pride means removal from God's olive tree, whether one is an original branch (the Jew) or a branch that is grafted on at a later stage (the Christian).

Levinas, like Maritain, concluded that Judaism in the post Second World War world was a mystery and something that was hard to pin down: was it a religion, a culture or a 'sensibilité diffuse faite de quelques idées et souvenirs, de quelques coutumes et émotions'?<sup>62</sup> His conclusion was that it is all of these and yet it has besides an 'essence exceptionnelle'<sup>63</sup> which defies scientific analysis. In the essay 'La pensée juive aujourd'hui' Levinas considered what followed the delusions of the Enlightenment, with its harmonious tolerance of Judaism and its emphasis on private worship, that is, the total shock of savage, non-rational Nazism. One of the post war legacies for Jews was a

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.48.

nostalgia for ancient Jewish sources and texts, which in turn led to the resurgence of active teaching groups that replaced the viewpoint that literature was something of mere historic interest. In addition, the 'passion'<sup>64</sup> as suffered by the Jews during the Second World War had a very different second consequence: that of effecting an ongoing, yet unresolved and irresolvable, relationship with Christians based on a brotherhood, which itself had its roots in the framework provided by the Talmud. Levinas pointed out that, in terms of the modern world, the differences between Jews and Christians were beginning to become increasingly irrelevant. Taking the place of these differences were those brought into existence by the rise of nations who did not share these same monotheist roots, a surge so vast that it swamped even Marxism (which he maintained, also had a Judaeo-Christian legacy in its social aims, a theme that Maritain also raised in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*). Like Maritain, he pondered how, in the face of such challenges, beliefs could stay true to their roots and yet be meaningful for contemporary audiences. And just as Maritain did with Thomism, Levinas insisted that Judaism had the history and the patient flexibility to provide support to every man through every age. For Judaism to truly flourish, it required reason and logic and, as he commented in the essay 'Israël et l'universalisme', an '[é]tat raisonnable'<sup>65</sup> alongside a 'conscience en commun'<sup>66</sup> and, finally, action, not mere dogma. The Jew cannot rest on a contented pride as a member of the chosen people, but instead has to see his vocation as one that entails onerous responsibilities. This statement recalls both Sartre's insistence that when man chooses to act he chooses for all men and must, therefore, be mindful of this responsibility and Maritain's condemnation of Christians who become too full of their own self-importance and lose their place on the olive tree. Jews and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.245.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.266.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.265.

Christians can have mutual respect, can be friends, as fellow human beings, and yet their relationship goes beyond this. Levinas stated in the essay 'Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne' that Jews and Christians also have in common the critical fact that both peoples are waiting for their Saviour; either for God to come in the first place or for God to return to Earth. This shared hope and longing brings Judaism out of the backwater of antiquated relics and into both the present and the future and it is because of this that Christians are able to go beyond respect for the individual Jew himself and find a respect for Judaism as a whole.<sup>67</sup> In turn, this Judaism shows a face of humanism, so important to the modern world, through its reverence for the belief in taking responsibility for one's fellow man, its commitment to action and, ultimately, as Levinas commented in the essay 'Pour un humanisme hébraïque', its position at 'au carrefour de la foi et de la logique'.<sup>68</sup>

At the conclusion of Second Vatican Council, it is reported that Levinas helped prepare a version of *Nostra Aetate* for the French Orthodox Rabbinate. Unfortunately, this was never issued because, like the original version debated at the Council, it provoked extreme dissent.<sup>69</sup> In the draft document Levinas outlined the similarities and the differences between Judaism and Christianity. His identification of similarities extended to the number of common beliefs the religions shared, the fact that both Christianity (and Islam) had contributed, like Judaism, to the improvement of humanity and how all three religions cleared the way for the Messiah. He called for eternal salvation for Christians, Jews and Muslims. However, such mutual understanding and sympathy did not imply a blurring of differences in fundamental doctrine. Here the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.304.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.407.

<sup>69</sup> Alan Brill, 'Levinas and *Nostra Aetate*', on website *The book of doctrines and opinions-notes on Jewish theology and spirituality*, <http://www.jidaily.com/GBdIE> [posted 23 September 2009, accessed 27 July 2014].



resemblance of his views to those of Maritain is extremely marked. Like Maritain, Levinas's respect for other religions did not mean subscribing to a vision of a happy rainbow mélange of faiths, but instead a firm defence of one's own faith whilst being generous to those of others. Each was promoting a respectful and healing dialogue between Jews and Christians which had been interrupted by the Second World War.

### **Levinas and Sartre**

Levinas attended the lecture Sartre gave to prominent Jews on a revised version of *Réflexions sur la question juive* in 1947. The very next day he began writing the unpublished essay 'Existentialism and Anti-Semitism'<sup>70</sup> in which he commented that rather than what had actually been said, the main attraction of the evening was, in fact, the person of the lecturer, Sartre himself, with 'his talent and breadth' giving, perhaps, the impression that he may have been a little star-struck. According to Hammerschlag, Levinas was not aware at that time that it was actually his own translation of Husserl that had given Sartre considerable inspiration; he would have been surely delighted to have heard this.<sup>71</sup> In the essay Levinas praised Sartre for his attack on Enlightenment principles, as demonstrated vividly in the portrait of the democrat, and commented on the fundamental changes in the world, which had rendered the principles of the Enlightenment outdated and totally irrelevant: '[h]uman thought is overwhelmed by historical, social and economic phenomena. We are rooted in these, but these roots are not thoughts'.<sup>72</sup> He cited a memorandum which had been circulated recently to parties interested in philosophy, in advance of the preparation of a report to the United Nations

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<sup>70</sup> The original French version was apparently unpublished and the quotations here are taken from an English translation by Denis Hollier and Rosalind Krauss which appeared in the journal *October* (winter 1999), 27-31.

<sup>71</sup> Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew*, p.118.

<sup>72</sup> Levinas, 'Existentialism and Anti-Semitism', p.28.

on the rights of man (a project that Maritain was, of course, involved in). This memorandum discussed the impossibility of true personal freedom without economic liberation. Sartre said Levinas, in keeping with that same ethos, saw man not only as a spiritual being but also one framed in the realities of his historical, economic and social situation. In Levinas's view, this position was Sartre's 'essential contribution to our cause, the cause of humanity';<sup>73</sup> an existentialist humanism that steers a course between the 'poets of blood and soil',<sup>74</sup> such as Maurras, and the hitherto hallowed preserves of cerebral Cartesian philosophy, which had proven itself to be totally inadequate in dealing with the force of the rhetoric of men like Maurras. Judaken comments that Levinas concurs with Sartre's critique of a liberal or Enlightenment version of society which 'conceives of human-being(s) as independent from milieu, birth, religion, and social status'.<sup>75</sup> Overall, the tone of Levinas's essay was one of unreserved praise for Sartre. There was little evidence to suggest that he was part of the body of people who had castigated Sartre strongly for defining Jewishness as something which came into being only through the gaze of the anti-Semite or for his lack of reference to the Holocaust (although he did show some measure of agreement with those who raised these objections, calling Sartre's linkage of Jewish tradition and destiny with nothing but anti-Semitism 'disappointing'<sup>76</sup>).

Later in the same year, Levinas wrote a second essay, 'Être Juif' ('Being Jewish').<sup>77</sup> Although the tone of this work still showed great respect for Sartre, it was less fulsome in its praise and seemed less in thrall to Sartre's charisma. In this essay

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Judaken, *Interrogations, Jewish Speculations, Spectres Juifs* no page numbers.

<sup>76</sup> Levinas, 'Existentialism and Anti-Semitism' p.27.

<sup>77</sup> 'Being Jewish', an English translation of 'Être Juif', by Mary Beth Mader, appeared in the *Continental Philosophy Review* (2007, 40), 205-210. This version has been used due to the difficulty of locating the French original.

Levinas looked back at the Jewish desire to be assimilated with the rest of society during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time in which 'religion, shrinking more and more, is limited to a colourless ancestor worship'.<sup>78</sup> Yet such yearning was hollow because even in the face of the separation of Church and State, Christianity retained its essential characteristic as a State religion, one so closely woven into the fabric of society, that it even dictated the dates and lengths of its public holidays. Thus, yet more evidence of the fragility of the Jew's position was exposed, a tenuous security supported by mere rationality and torn apart by Hitler. In the return to racial myth, Hitler brought the Jew sharply to face his past and 'reminded the Jew of the irremissibility of his being.' The Jew's attempt to flee his condition was typical of every man's desire to escape. Therefore, maintained Levinas, the human soul was 'perhaps naturally Jewish'.<sup>79</sup> With this statement he echoed Sartre's portrayal of the Jew as the representative of every man, especially those individuals who find themselves on the fringes of society (in fact, he also brings to mind Bloy's portrait of the Jew excluded from mainstream life). However, Levinas did not agree with Sartre's assertion that the Jew (like all men) had no 'essence'. The Jew, he said, was not free merely to choose his destiny in the present (or not to choose; this passivity is still a 'choice' in Sartrean terms). Instead, he was a product of Jewishness itself and was 'the very entrance of the religious event into the world; better yet, he is the impossibility of a world without religion'.<sup>80</sup> Levinas questioned whether any man could really be so devoid of context and comprise nothing but the sum of his actions. For the Jew, the context of the past is so critical that it is part of his 'very mystery of personhood'. In fact, he concluded, this mystery was the only

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.209.

mystery left in a world that had been laid bare by the science of the here and now.

Therefore:

Jewish existence is thus the fulfilment of the human condition as fact, personhood and freedom. And its entire originality consists in breaking with a world that is without origin and simply present. It is situated from the very start in a dimension that Sartre cannot apprehend.<sup>81</sup>

With echoes of Sartre's portrait of the anti-Semite, he finished the essay by turning to what non-Jews (but not necessarily anti-Semites) saw and felt when they beheld the Jew; and not only the individual Jew but aspects of Judaism itself. Levinas maintained that their experience was often one of a gut feeling of distaste or even of hatred. However, unlike anti-Semites this revulsion did not arise from racism alone but was provoked by a fear of the sacred which the Jew represented. Therefore, although Levinas might share common ground with Sartre, he saw authentic Judaism as so much more than the mere mirror reflection of an anti-Semite. Rather, it was something that had its own essence and which gave the Jew a special entry point, although not an exclusive gateway, into the world of ethics.

An interesting and vital link between Levinas and Sartre can be found in the figure of Benny Lévy, who was secretary and confidant to Sartre during the last years of his life. The way Lévy discharged this role has attracted considerable controversy, especially when he conducted a series of interviews (referred to earlier in this chapter)

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.210.

with Sartre, shortly before the latter's death, in which the philosopher was heard to reject existentialism and to embrace aspects of Judaism as a result of his studies of the Torah.<sup>82</sup> Despite Sartre's insistence that the interviews were genuine, a cloud of suspicion continues to hover over Lévy, suggesting that he had undue influence over a frail and vulnerable elderly man. Lévy had studied the writings of Levinas and had taken up a position of opposition, especially against what he considered to be Levinas's erroneous attachment to intellectual philosophy and his connection of Judaism to philosophy, as shown in particular by Levinas's essay 'Être Juif'.<sup>83</sup> However, this objection on the part of Lévy, who believed that Judaism and philosophy were mutually exclusive, has to be somewhat simplistic. Although Levinas did acknowledge the importance of a philosophical underpinning, especially the tools of logic and reason, to help ensure that faith was something more than mere dogma, he was never slow, as noted earlier in this chapter, to point out not only the positives of philosophy but also the shortcomings, namely, as he saw it, self-reflexivity and abstraction.

A final interesting twist in the question of what defined authenticity in the minds of Sartre and Levinas is provided an essay written by Peter Gordon.<sup>84</sup> Gordon concluded that Sartre used the Jew to demonstrate human authenticity and inauthenticity and defined authenticity as a move from 'passivity to agency, and from flight to auto-election'.<sup>85</sup> The authentic Jew, therefore, became far more than just a creation of the anti-Semite's gaze and proclaimed his Jewishness in the face of all adversity, rejecting the notion of the universal man and accepting his history as what

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<sup>82</sup> Lévy, *L'espoir maintenant*, p.77.

<sup>83</sup> Annabel Herzog, 'Benny Lévy versus Emmanuel Levinas on "Being Jewish"', *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 26, Issue 1 (2006), 15-30.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Gordon, 'Out from *Huis Clos*: Sartre, Levinas and the debate over Jewish authenticity', *Journal of Romance Studies*, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 and 2 (2006), 155-168.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.158.

Sartre called a 'créature historique et damnée'.<sup>86</sup> He accepts who he is and also embraces social pluralism while the anti-Semite chooses to remain passively trapped within a rigid perception of the world: 'The anti-Semite has chosen to found his being upon an exteriority'.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, authenticity is closely linked in Sartre's philosophy, says Gordon, with self-determination on the part of man, without help from any external source, including God. Gordon described Sartre's view of relations with others as an 'antagonistic theory of intersubjective relations' with authenticity being 'a project of self-retrieval'.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, Gordon continued, Levinas's version of authenticity of the being came through its relation with the 'other'. It is all about intersubjective relations and the individual is constituted by and tied to 'an alterity it cannot contain', something that is not knowable and which 'exceeds its capacities for representation'<sup>89</sup> (this has much in common with Maritain's theories of the overflowing abundance of the existent). The two views of authenticity oppose one another fundamentally in this reading; authenticity is found either in the relation with the other or in the removal of oneself from this relationship and in self-determination. Gordon pointed out that Sartre's portraits of the anti-Semite and the inauthentic Jew are, paradoxically, in Levinasian terms, illustrations of authenticity, because each looks outside himself for identity, whereas it is actually Sartre's authentic Jew who, in choosing to determine himself, shows Levinasian inauthenticity. This analysis depicts the two philosophies as closely-related mirror images of one other.

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<sup>86</sup> Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p.166.

<sup>87</sup> Gordon, 'Out from *Huis Clos*: Sartre, Levinas and the debate over Jewish authenticity', p.159.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.164.

### Levinas and Maritain

As we have already seen, in the 'passion' of the Jews in Nazi Germany (like Maritain he called it a 'passion'), Levinas found a force that fixed the Jew firmly to his Jewishness and provided a microscopically small silver lining of unforeseen benefit, in that the Jew had an opportunity to re-discover the precious nature of his Jewishness. Levinas defined this essence as transcendent and something that was diametrically opposed to the limitations of paganism. In fact, he believed that the rise of Nazism had reminded the Jew of his vocation as God's witness. There are a number of parallels with Maritain's writings. Both men depict the Jew's destiny to be one of suffering and of 'passion'. Furthermore they talk of the 'mystery' of Judaism and equate Nazism with paganism. Furthermore, there is evidence that they had much in common in the late 1930s. At that time, Maritain was giving the lectures that would result in the publication of 'Les Juifs parmi les Nations' and *Antisemitism*. Writing in 1938, Levinas examined an aspect of Maritain's writings which he believed had been ignored by many: Maritain's thoughts on the deep nature of the 'metaphysics' of anti-Semitism.<sup>90</sup> Jews and Christians, Levinas commented, are similar because both groups stand outside the temporal world and never feel totally at home in it. In posing a threat that questions the world, neither can ever be integrated fully into it even if they wished to be. Both Jews and Christians stand opposed to paganism (implied in this context to be Nazism), which is firmly rooted in the temporal world. However, despite these similarities, Levinas maintained that the Christian could not see the deep underlying harmony between Judaism and Christianity because, ironically, the Christian interprets the refusal of the Jew to convert to Christianity as an attachment to the temporal world. This leads to antagonism, which in

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<sup>90</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'L'essence spirituelle de l'antisémitisme (d'après Jacques Maritain)', *Paix et Droit*, 18, No.5 (1938), 150-151.

turn leads to the suffering of the Jew and his role as 'ferment' in the world (all of this reasoning and language is very much in keeping with Maritain's writings). Levinas insisted that we must distinguish the antagonism of the Christian clearly from anti-Semitism, which arises from the exact opposite reason; that is, because the world abhors the passion of the Jews for the next world, a passion that makes them strangers in this one. The result is that the Jew is criticised by the Christian for being too attached to this world and by the anti-Semite for being too concerned with the next one. Furthermore, by a short step of logic, says Levinas, anti-Semitism could be just as easily turned in the direction of Christians and anti-Semitism, therefore, must be as hostile to Christianity as it is to Judaism.<sup>91</sup> Here we hear echoes of Maritain and Christophobia.

Levinas and Maritain shared the desire to never dilute nor compromise their own beliefs, whether these lay in Talmudic Judaism or Thomistic Catholicism. At the same time, both were prepared to extend the hand of respectful friendship to other faith groups and to desire a dialogue with them. Each had a deep attachment to humanism, which arose from their respective faiths or at least from the cultures that their faiths were bound up in. In these qualities, one might claim that both men, not just Maritain, displayed the duality of 'hard head and soft heart'. Certainly, both rejected the positivism of the nineteenth century and Enlightenment principles and each considered that man's way forward was a combination of faith, or adherence to tradition at least, and rigorous intellectual practice. Both debated and attempted to resolve the conundrum of a faith and tradition that consists of ancient, unalterable truth and belief yet must still be made relevant to modern man and both pondered the consequences of the rise of cultures that had no Abrahamic roots. Each believed that true faith meant

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.150-151.



turning outwards from the self towards others and both saw the importance of living out faith and tradition in a community.

### **Comparing Maritain, Sartre and Levinas**

Maritain, Sartre and Levinas came from very different philosophical standpoints (put simply, Thomistic realism, existentialism and phenomenology respectively). Although Maritain's and Sartre's philosophies found common ground in existentialism (for example, in the shared belief that existence took precedence over essence), their 'versions' of existentialism stand ultimately a long way apart. Apart from the obvious difference in their views on the existence or non-existence of God, the clearest distinction concerned the issue of 'a priori' morality. This question of whether man was defined by his acts after the event and chose for all men by his actions (Sartre's position) or whether there was a non-negotiable code for man to follow which helped to guide him towards a possible glimpse of truth (Maritain's position) played a fundamental role in shaping each man's version of existentialism and also coloured their writings on the Jews and Judaism. On the other hand, Levinas, while expressing a real admiration for both Sartre and Maritain, distanced himself from the entire existentialist movement. His philosophic position is complex. For example, on the one hand, he praised Maritain's attempts to solve 'la question juive' in a metaphysical way (and was criticised himself in some quarters for placing too great an emphasis on philosophy), yet on the other hand he stated that philosophy is empty and self-reflexive. What is clear is that all three men disdained and rejected the Cartesian tradition, even if their motivations and reasons for doing so were very different. And certainly all three shared common influences in Bergson, Husserl and even Bloy (his influence on Levinas can be seen through the latter's war-time study of Bloy's letters to his fiancée and the impact of this in Levinas's

writings on suffering and on the feminine<sup>92</sup>). What distinguishes Maritain from both Sartre and Levinas is his realist philosophy which promised the possibility that truth could be discovered or at least glimpsed, if it were sought after with sincerity and dedication. Such absolute certainty is very much at odds with the positions of both Sartre and Levinas who were more concerned with the 'authenticity' of the human being, or with his relation to those around him. As we have seen many times before, Maritain never waived from the position that the objective truth exists, that man longs to grasp it and that he is thwarted only by his inability to do so. From Levinas's phenomenological perspective, the individual, aware of his utter aloneness, seeks to escape by throwing himself into the world, but feels nothing but disgust and shame when this escape route, after bringing initial satisfaction, ends in failure, leaving him alone once again. In a further futile attempt to bring the desired relief from aloneness, the individual turns to a relationship with the other, which, although doomed to failure on one sense in that the individual can never fully know the other, at least provides some limited satisfaction through the responsibility and care that the individual can take for the other. Thus, while there was hope (of a kind) for Maritain that man might be able to know, or even just grasp fleetingly, the 'truth', this was not the case for Levinas. But surely such a comparison is irrelevant and meaningless. After all, Levinas believed that ethics, the placing of the needs of others before one's own and the generous treatment of others, took precedence over a theoretical, and potentially empty, philosophy.

In terms of social and political issues, Maritain, Levinas and Sartre had things in common and, to a greater or lesser extent, all represented the mood of the 1930s and

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<sup>92</sup> Seán Hand, 'Salvation through Literature: Levinas's *Carnets de Captivité*', *Levinas Studies*, Vol.8 (2013), 45-65 (p.58).

1940s, which for many constituted a desire to set something concrete against the horrors of fascism: a pluralist society which tolerated all men and prized care for one's fellow man. For Maritain and Levinas at least, this did not imply that one's own position in religious and cultural beliefs should be diluted. Instead it should be firmly defended, but this defence should also involve tolerance and an openness to listen to the views of others. This mix of qualities (a clear manifestation of a hard head and a soft heart) takes its strongest form in Maritain's apparent influence on the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* and in Levinas's alleged attempts to introduce a 'Jewish version' after the Council. For both Maritain and Levinas, worship (or the celebration of tradition) had a communal aspect as well as a deeply personal meaning.

Tolerance for all men, Jews included, and a firm rejection of anti-Semitism is common to all three, but Sartre and Maritain attracted considerable criticism for their apparent disregard of the nature of Judaism. This criticism went even further in Maritain's case because of his controversial position which, on the one hand, protected the individual Jew from persecution in the temporal world yet, on the other hand, still regarded him in spiritual matters as an unfulfilled Christian. Both Maritain and Sartre viewed the Jew as 'suffering', but while Sartre saw the Jew as a cipher for the fate of every individual who was pushed to the fringes of society, and downplayed Jewish 'suffering' when it suited him to unite all Frenchmen together irrespective of their origin, post- Second World war, Maritain saw this 'suffering' as something necessary and noble, constant and particular to the Jews (even if it shared aspects of the sufferings of Christ and Christians). In both Maritain's and Levinas's writings (at least in Maritain's mature writings) there was an emphasis on the Jew as an integral part of his people and tradition, something which, despite later forays, never featured strongly in the make-up of the Jew in Sartre's work.

## Conclusion

While there are differences in the positions of Maritain, Sartre and Levinas there are also considerable similarities, which have been summarised above. The key question that remains is why Sartre and Levinas are still so widely read and admired today in France while Maritain is not, particularly as all three were highly influential in their day. Maritain's demise in popularity and relevance may be caused at least in part by his reluctance to adapt his position, his rejection of opportunities (for example, it appears that he turned down the chance to write the foreword to Wiesel's *La Nuit*) and his tendency, whether through bad luck or poor judgement, to be in the wrong place at the wrong time (for example, he was in Rome when philosophers in Paris debated the territory of post-war French philosophy). The next two chapters will explore this puzzle further. Chapter Five looks at Maritain's influence and reputation in North America, where he spent many years in the 1950s, and explores why he is still held in esteem there. Maritain is a highly respected figure in South America too and notable figures have studied his work (for example, Enrique Dussel's doctoral thesis defended Maritain's humanism and personalism but, due to constraints of time and space this cannot be explored further). Chapter Six will examine in more detail the downward trajectory of Maritain's reputation in his homeland of France. There are many possibilities as to why the strength of Maritain's reputation varies by geography, including, of course, the very different cultural and political environments. Maritain always wrote from his position as a Catholic, and it may be that it is this which has led to his disappearance in France, mirroring the decline of the influence of the Catholic Church itself. However, there are further questions to examine. Maritain, as we saw in Chapter Two, was a man whose beliefs and themes ran consistently through his work, culminating in his partially successful and highly controversial 'testament', *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. But, given the

breadth and richness of his work, his wide ranging career and long life and even his ability to write in two different languages, has there been a temptation for people to filter and select carefully the Maritain they choose to see and to use his work to further a cause or argument? In his complexity has Maritain become a series of different people, resurrected in various forms to suit different purposes? Ironically for a man who believed in an absolute truth, has he become the person his interpreters want and need him to be? Certainly, whatever the reason, his legacy does not seem as stable and as consistent as those of Sartre and Levinas and the recognition he receives is but a shadow of theirs.

## Chapter Five: Maritain as a 'French-Atlantic' thinker

### Introduction

Maritain spent most of the 1940s and 1950s in America, returning to France on a permanent basis only in 1961, after the death of Raïssa. He retained a deep and lasting affection for the United States, which, he felt, had provided a safe harbour to him and his family on their effective exile there at the beginning of the Second World War. In turn, and despite the fact that he had been viewed with suspicion in the 1930s by some American Catholics (due in large part to his lack of support for Franco), the United States has continued over the decades to hold Maritain in high esteem as an influential thinker, a philosopher whom, it might believe, it had welcomed and adopted generously in his hour of need. From this secure base, Maritain's influence radiated outwards to Canada and to South America, where he continues to be widely read to the present day. So, why is Maritain's reputation still honoured in the Americas while it has fallen into relative obscurity in his native France? This chapter explores potential causes. In particular, it examines Maritain's writings about the United States and compares and contrasts them with what he said about France. This will help to establish whether, through some conscious or unconscious difference of treatment on his part, he himself contributed to the creation of this polarised reputation. In addition, the chapter will consider whether the imbalance arises from external factors beyond the direct control of Maritain. The place accorded to Maritain in debates within American intellectual communities will be explored, and this will be compared and contrasted with his designated position among similar groups in France. Finally, the chapter will examine whether Maritain has influenced any significant figures in the United States, most notably Saul Alinsky who, in turn, is credited with helping to shape the views of both Barack Obama and Hillary

Clinton. If any such influence does indeed exist, then this might be viewed as a contributory factor to Maritain's on-going respected reputation in America.

### ***Man and the State: Maritain's political and social theory***

Some setting of context is needed before examining Maritain's most overt portrait of the United States, *Reflections on America*.<sup>1</sup> Central to this backdrop is *Man and the State*,<sup>2</sup> published in 1951 and based on a series of six lectures delivered in late 1949, which were, in turn, part of the programme of Walgreen Foundation Lectures delivered at the University of Chicago. *Man and the State* consolidated and developed themes which Maritain had explored in earlier works. Ultimately, it provides the clearest and most succinct picture of Maritain's views on the relationship that exists between the individual and the body political. At the time of writing, it is worth noting that Maritain's work shared a symbiotic relationship with the output of his former student, Yves Simon. It is difficult to determine who exactly may have influenced whom, but certainly, as indicated by the close friendship of the two men and also as highlighted by the references each makes to the other in their works, the influence quite probably extended both ways. Like Maritain, Simon was stranded in America as a result of the outbreak of Germany's occupation of France, after arriving there to give a lecture in 1938. Also like Maritain, Simon participated in the Walgreen Foundation Lectures. His work *Philosophy of Demographic Government*, published, as was *Man and the State*, in 1951, was also based on a series of six lectures, but was delivered a year before Maritain's own. Various other essays show a concentration on themes similar to those found in Maritain's work. For example, 'Freedom in Daily Life', published just after the

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Reflections on America* (New York: Gordian Press, 1958). Henceforth *Reflections on America* (RA).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951). Henceforth *Man and the State* (MS).

end of the Second World War examined the collapse of Rousseau-inspired liberalism, which Simon claimed was a philosophy that required only 'minimum effort and minimum generosity'<sup>3</sup> and which had been seen to crumple all too easily in the face of Nazi totalitarianism. The mistake the French made, said Simon, was to confuse liberalism with true freedom, and this gave them the permission to pursue lazy material pleasures while at the same time comforting themselves that Nazism could never take hold in a civilised country like their own. It was in this complacency and indifference, said Simon that real danger lay. Just like Maritain's, Simon's philosophy focused on the search for absolute truth, however difficult that search might be and, indeed, however challenging the truth itself turned out to be. It is in this truth, he stated, that true freedom, rather than the mere illusion of freedom, resided: '[a]ll of our real freedom is contained within the limits of our knowledge of truth'<sup>4</sup> and '[t]he love of truth is the most natural thing in the world.'<sup>5</sup> Simon recognised two kinds of truth, a religious one and a practical, historical truth. He referred to Maritain when discussing these, referencing his strong adherence to the concept of natural (non- manmade) law, which is a key tenet of Thomism. In essence, said Simon, true freedom arises when a being interiorises the natural law that governs it and behaves in harmonious accordance with it: therefore, '[f]reedom, correctly understood, is the most ordered thing in the world'.<sup>6</sup> So, the free man loves order and detests arbitrariness (which Simon exemplified through such things as the random attacks of a despot). To preserve order, the free man has to stifle his ego and conform to laws that cater for the common good and must do this consistently in day-to-day life, even in times of harmony where there is no external threat from a

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<sup>3</sup> Yves Simon, 'Freedom in Daily Life' in *Freedom and Community* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Simon, *Freedom and Community*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.19.



barbaric intruder. Yet, inextricable from this willing subjugation to the common good, the free man still retains his unique dignity in religious matters. In this juxtaposition of man's social role and his inherent uniqueness in the eyes of God, Simon demonstrated that he had much in common with Maritain, with Levinas and with personalism as exemplified by Mounier. And just like Maritain, he showed a resolute opposition to totalitarianism in whatever form it might take, be it fascism or communism. However, there is a key difference between Simon and Maritain in the fact that, while Simon talked about societies in general terms with occasional references to France, Maritain used America almost exclusively to illustrate all that he saw as good about men living side by side; and at times, he even used the picture he painted of American society to attack France. In showing himself so overtly as a staunch champion of America, Maritain took a different path from that chosen by Simon. One likely reason was the recognition for Maritain that, as well as a place of safe harbour, it was at one and the same time the prime exemplar of a place where religious and social tolerance could flourish and yet where religious truth was also prized as being something of vital importance. As Maritain commented in *Reflections on America*, Alinsky was in the process of enacting in Chicago a very practical example of Maritain's social philosophy (RA 164).

### ***Man and the State***

Turning to *Man and the State*, it is difficult to divorce any reading of it from what was happening politically at that time, namely the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine came into being in 1947, NATO in 1949 and the Crusade for Freedom in 1950. Joseph McCarthy was rising in prominence, with the term 'McCarthyism' first used in 1950. America was engaged in creating an ally in a strong, united and democratic Europe in which Germany would play a part, in order to counter the Russian threat. Maritain, of course, opposed

totalitarianism in any form and communism, rather than fascism, was now to him the enemy. This aversion was only strengthened in 1949 by the Papal ban on Catholic membership of the communist party (there are obvious parallels here with what happened with the Action Française in 1926). His conviction coloured his writing in *Man and the State*, which appeared in 1951 when the desire to repel Russian communism was reaching its peak.

One of the first points that attract the reader's attention in *Man and the State* is the similarity of the manner in which Maritain talks about the body politic and his description of the body of the Catholic Church in later works such as *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and *De L'Église du Christ*. In the same way as he was to dissect the Church, Maritain specified the different components of the body politic and described their relationship, one to another. Thus, we have the State, which Maritain called 'the superior part in the body politic' (MS 13), the most important part of the whole but not more important than the whole itself. The State is the part of the body politic that concerns itself with public welfare and the interests of all men taken as a whole, and is a rational and abstract 'set of institutions' (MS 12) rather than a mere man or a group of men. The danger in the role of the State is that it can become too self-absorbed in the pursuit of its own power and forget about the common good: the very thing that it is there to promote. The connection with communism is implied yet clear. However, the example Maritain actually offers up is the absolutist monarchy of pre-Revolutionary France. He stated that this overblown power, instead of being crushed by the Revolution as it should have been, passed instead to the Nation. And worse still, he said, because of the prevailing social and political theory of the times, the State was made into a person, taking on the absolute sovereignty of the Nation. Therefore, in one short step 'the despotic or absolutist notion of the State was largely accepted among democratic tenets

by the theorists of democracy' (MS 17). This in turn permitted the State to substitute itself for its people and to leave this people adrift from political life. So, Maritain gives a clear criticism of (admittedly long-past) French politics at a time when a contemporary reading of the book would be bound to evoke communist Russia. He then makes the link overt by saying that, in extreme circumstances, democracies may turn to totalitarianism, such as Nazism and communism. Thus, the reader sees communism linked both to the devastation of the Second World War and also to a corrupt regime that was swept away in the terror of the French Revolution. The imperative, according to Maritain, had to be to reduce State control, develop social justice and improve economic management across the whole world. He conceded that he was not anti-State, because he could see that it fulfilled a vital role in protecting the interests of the poor and downtrodden, but insisted that the State must be free from the false notions of sovereignty that give it a corrupted and overblown power and led to it equating itself with the whole of the body politic, rather than playing only its important part. The solution, said Maritain, would be to decentralise control and allow communities to govern themselves as far as possible, leading to 'a definitely personalist and pluralist pattern of social life' (MS 23) where different types of private enterprise could flourish. We can see here that he has not abandoned his principles of the 1930s, as illustrated in *Humanisme intégral*. The State then becomes 'a topmost agency concerned only with the final supervision of the achievements of institutions born out of freedom' (MS 23). In turn, the people are governed by men whom they have chosen. Maritain illustrated his point by quoting Abraham Lincoln, who called for 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (MS 25). He concluded by saying that 'the people are not for the State, the State is for the people' (MS 26). And the people comprise a collection of quite separate and individual souls, each of whom has a 'supratemporal destiny' (MS 26). The result is a

distinction between two creeds: one human and temporal that deals with the practicalities of managing day to day life (for example, political and social rights and responsibilities) and one that is philosophical or religious. Here we hear clear echoes of the themes of *Primauté du Spirituel*; while the body politic can promote the first type of creed, it has no right to impose the second type. The implication was that, although the things held dear by Catholicism were Maritain's personal choices for a religious creed, other Christians and non-Christians had the freedom to pick their own religious creed. Thus, the State should concern itself only with 'the common secular faith in the common secular charter' (MS 114). One can see many parallels with earlier works (besides *Primauté du Spirituel*, as noted above, *Humanisme intégral* comes to mind) as well as with those still to come (for example *Le Mystère d'Israël* and *Le Paysan de la Garonne*). Crucially, one can also see parallels both with Alinsky's work (governance by local communities) and even with the constitution of the United States itself. In quoting Lincoln to bring to life one of his most important points, Maritain had begun to position himself as a 'French-Atlantic' thinker. Interestingly, his evocation of personalist principles in this work and their warm reception in the United States contrasts strongly with the demise of the prominence of personalism in France, not least due to Mounier's premature death in 1950. As Michael Kelly comments, by this point 'personalism was no longer a viable ideology, politically or culturally' due to its lack of coherence and practical application for its core middle-class audience and its intellectualism, which was of scant appeal to the working classes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Kelly, *Pioneer of the Catholic Revival. The ideas and influence of Emmanuel Mounier*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), p.167.

### Maritain's portrait of the United States - *Reflections on America*

In 1958 Maritain's *Reflections on America* was published, a work based on three seminars delivered two years previously at the University of Chicago. In the foreword to the book, Maritain made an observation that chimes closely with words he was to use later in the opening of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* when he said 'I take truth seriously; I don't take myself seriously' (RA 9). Although the non-negotiable existence of an absolute truth and man's never-ending quest to glimpse had been seen many times, what had been less obvious up to this point was his playful side; as shown when he said 'I no longer wish (as I did in my youth) to irritate the reader, or even to put his sense of humor to the test' (RA 9). One could speculate on the causes of this change. As Maritain himself implied, it might be attributed to greater maturity or, perhaps, it might have arisen from the contented glow of a period in his life when he lived without any real (or perceived ) threat of danger and basked in the generally uncritical admiration of those around him. It might also have been generated by a shrewd appreciation of his audience and the optimistic and positive tone that they might prefer. Certainly, *Reflections on America* is light and generous and very accessible to a casual reader; to such an extent that Alinsky commented in a letter to Maritain that the book would find an audience well beyond Maritain's usual readership.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to reconcile this rather skittish Maritain with the caustic author of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. Yet, just as he was to do a few years later, Maritain set the scene for the reader by presenting the work as a series of random reflections (however, although the language of *Reflections on America* is relatively simple, Maritain did not feel any need to comment, as he did in the introduction to *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, that he knew he was going to be extremely blunt and possibly even cause offence to the reader). Both works sold extremely well,

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<sup>8</sup> Doering (ed.), *The Philosopher and the Provocateur*, p.70.

although for different reasons. *Reflections on America*, as Alinsky tells us, was received with affection in the United States<sup>9</sup> - not surprisingly when one considers its rather sycophantic tone - and, although the language is as down to earth as that of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, it contains none of the biting tone that shocked and alienated so many readers of the later work. However, this new directness of tone, even if it were pleasantly wrapped up and softly embellished and well-received by most Americans, was not viewed with totally uncritical favour by Alinsky himself who commented that, although he was amused by Maritain's use of the vernacular, he felt that the 'simple, pithy gutter language' that he, Alinsky, used, was somewhat unbecoming in a person of Maritain's intellectual stature.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, more than anything else, this reveals just how large was the pedestal on which Alinsky had placed Maritain, unless it indicates merely his irritation that Maritain had accessed and used one of Alinsky's own distinguishing features.

In assembling these so-called random thoughts in *Reflections on America*, Maritain positioned himself as following in the footsteps of French writers from earlier centuries, among them figures such as Chateaubriand and Tocqueville: as a Frenchman observing America, with all the cultural birthright, emotional heritage and presuppositions that this implies (RA 11). Tocqueville was an early and well-known nineteenth century commentator on American society. Thomas Howard asserts that his analysis of the relationship between church and state in the United States is, simultaneously, one that some readers have endorsed and yet also one that others have used as a stick with which to beat America:<sup>11</sup> '[w]here Tocqueville saw privatized religiosity contributing significantly to a voluntary spirit, philanthropy, and the march of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Howard, *God and the Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.6.

freedom, others saw rampant sectarianism'.<sup>12</sup> Howard presents Maritain as an example of a reader who chose to see the positive and constructive side of this 'privatized religiosity'.<sup>13</sup> In adopting this position, Maritain may well have been at odds with the views of many of his fellow Frenchmen; Howard maintains that the majority of the French, even more so than any other European people, sneer at America as a place of 'soulless modernity [...] religious misfits [...] cultural mediocrity'.<sup>14</sup> In addition, neither the right nor the left of the French political spectrum have found much to please them in America (as, indeed, neither side did when reviewing *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, so this alienation was something that the United States and the older Maritain had in common). For those on the right, says Howard, America demonstrated 'naive democratic idealism'<sup>15</sup> and many writers of this political persuasion, notably Maurras, launched savage attacks on President Wilson, who, with his particular version of Protestantism, came to symbolise all that this faction thought was wrong with post- First World War America. On the other hand, for those on the left, America, according to Howard, was 'simply far too religious'.<sup>16</sup> And for both sides of the French political divide, he maintains, the people of the United States 'lacked profundity [...] and displayed a derisible anti-intellectualism'.<sup>17</sup> Maritain, in *Reflections on America*, chose, however, to present this alleged lack of intellectual pretention as a total irrelevance and preferred to concentrate on painting a picture, gained apparently from his first impressions of the country (or so he claimed), of a people who loved both freedom and their fellow man, and who prized, above all else, a firm ethical position. Showing mild agreement with the majority of his European contemporaries, Maritain did concede his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.164.

worries about the threatening nature of the massiveness of the structure of American industrial civilisation, something which was becoming an increasingly feared machine in Europe, especially as America supported (or pushed its way into) Europe via the Marshall Plan, but unlike his contemporaries, he maintained that the American people within this 'machine' actually operated only from a sense of pragmatic need and 'were keeping their own souls apart from it' (RA 22). In fact, applying a flattering and sweeping coat of whitewash, he insisted that 'the American people are the least materialist among the modern peoples which have attained the industrial stage' (RA 29). If they cared about money, he claimed, it was only because they saw it as a means to an end, and that end was one of generosity and charity. In the soul of the American people as a whole, there existed, he maintained with breath-taking generalisation, no materialism, no egoism and no avarice (RA 33). Instead Americans had a strong ethical conscience, a predisposition to discuss matters of importance and a commitment to education and wisdom (RA 38).

### **Maritain and 'the race question'**

Maritain's burning desire to depict as heroic the nation which had welcomed, protected and honoured him and his family bumped up against many issues which threatened to derail this gleaming image of virtue. The biggest potential obstacle surfaced when he turned to the subject of 'the race question' (RA 49), as he described racism in the United States, bringing to the mind of the reader, no doubt intentionally, all the implications that are bound up in the phrase 'la question juive'. Maritain did not choose to ignore the issue of American racism, (indeed, if he had tried to do so, writing in the mid 1950s when the subject of race emancipation was very much in the spotlight, it may have looked more than a little odd to his readership), but he did manage to extricate himself



from an almost impossible argument of defence and justification by maintaining that the subject was too complex and its roots too deep to be discussed in what was after all, only a brief work (RA 49). He did attempt to mitigate the impact of the racism he saw by stressing that the law of the land was clear on its insistence on equal rights for all American citizens, and that it was only local and individual custom and tradition, deeply embedded over centuries, that impeded equality of treatment in practice. Although he criticised churches and religious bodies for their part in maintaining racial segregation (for example, through their maintenance of separate pews in church), his barbs were blunt and he was quick to move on, asserting that the clergy was becoming more and more heavily involved in the fight against racism. But he went further than making mild excuses for American attitudes and behaviours. Rather shockingly, he constructed an argument that Americans were actually victims of their own racist behaviour and could, therefore, be excused responsibility for it: '[a]s a rule, those who fall prey to racial prejudice do not glory in it [...] it's a kind of physical condition with which they were born, they cannot help feeling this way, that's all' (RA 53). It is indeed a strenuous feat for the reader to make the leap in reconciling this dismissive statement with Maritain's customary insistence on the individual taking responsibility for his own actions in his quest for and defence of an absolute spiritual truth, while also simultaneously and actively extending the hand of friendship to all men (as we have already seen in his best-known works). It is also quite impossible to see how he could reconcile such a position with *Man and the State* where he presented, only a few years earlier, the case for the equality of all men in a state that should protect these rights. However, whilst this example of presenting excuses for morally questionable behaviour was particularly blatant, it was not the first time that it had been seen in Maritain's work. As Chapter Three showed, in the late 1930s work *Antisemitism*, Maritain speculated that the French

could never be truly anti-semitic as it was alien to their nature; a temperament steeped in 'reason' and far removed from the petty bourgeois ideology in which anti-Semitism thrived. Strikingly, when one examines his wartime broadcasts from America on the subject of the French and anti-Semitism, it can be seen that he applies exactly the same approach that he used in these to the subject of Americans and racism in *Reflections on America*. His wartime speeches are full of reference to the heroism of France and evoke its proud history and spirit. In reality the cloud that threatened to tarnish this shining picture was France's treatment of its Jews. For this reason (and this is seen most clearly in the 1942 radio broadcast and essay 'La persecution raciste en France'<sup>18</sup>) Maritain laid the blame for such behaviour only at the door of the Vichy administration, who, he insisted, did not represent in any way the true French spirit. In a sense, he scapegoated the activity of scapegoating itself. In *Reflections on America*, he maintained that 'the Negro question' was a thorn in the side of America and a 'wound' which it was seeking to heal, exactly because it was 'repellent' to its own nature (RA 57). In this choice of vocabulary, Maritain evoked the almost identical words he used in his 1942 broadcast, which, in turn, echoed his 1940 work, *A travers le désastre*. Here, he effectively absolved the French from persecution of the Jews, by insisting that, because their honour was betrayed and 'wounded', they suffered every bit as much as the Jews did under the anti-semitic Vichy government. Thus, they shared their 'wounds' with those suffered by Americans in the face of racism.

Even though Maritain extended the same excuses for racism to Americans as those which he offered for the French in the face of their anti-Semitism, this similarity of treatment of the two peoples was not typical of the book. In most areas he was at pains to draw out the differences between the French and the Americans. Nowhere in

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<sup>18</sup> Contained in *Le Mystère d'Israël et autres essais* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1965).

*Reflections on America* is this more obvious than when he compares the ideals of accepted national social values. These he chose to name as 'intelligence' in France and 'goodness' in America (RA 66). The French focus on 'intelligence' results, he said, in a feeling that when one returns to France one is in danger of 'entering a wasp's nest' (RA 67) because one is stung on all sides by malice and aggression. He did concede that the sharpness of French intellectualism led to a competitiveness that produced results, whereas the American lived in constant dread of being viewed as cleverer than his fellow man and, therefore, of outshining him. However, he saw (naturally) a positive side even to this modesty and self-effacement. This he described as intellectual tolerance. As an example, he presented the alleged open and warm American reception to St John of Thomas's reading and interpretation of St Thomas's work and contrasts this with its reception in France, where, he commented, rather acidly, people felt that 'they had sufficiently good eyesight to read the text of the *Summa* without any assistance' (RA 152). Maritain did tender only one downside of such openness: a predisposition on the part of Americans towards an overdeveloped empiricism and a fear of ideas (RA 97). These preferences were ones that usually attracted his scorn. However, they along with, in Maritain's view, a somewhat misguided overvaluation of the virtues of constant activity and industriousness, did mean that, in his view, Americans lacked a solid and lasting philosophy (but, taking the obsequiously positive opportunity to turn even this lack of necessary philosophy into a virtue, he attributed this to modesty on their part). Americans needed, said Maritain, patronisingly, intellectuals to help and guide them on their way (RA 119). One cannot help but wonder if he is promoting himself into this role. Going ever further in his attempts to paint the United States as the ideal nation, even despite their lack of intellectual rigour, something which he had always maintained up to that point was an essential in life, he paid Americans what for him was the ultimate

compliment. He praised both their belief in truth and their lack of fear in expressing their views on this truth. It is only, he declared, through such a belief in truth that one could become a genuinely tolerant citizen and someone able to respect others who hold to their own truths. Conversely, he said, it is the man who believes in nothing who is really intolerant of others. Such people run, he maintained, a risk of becoming 'pseudo-spirituals' and people who 'look for the divine and are captives of the flesh, and of the void' (RA 126). The less than subtle implication made by Maritain in drawing out the comparison is that this risk is run by the French.

### **America as the home of true Christianity**

Furthermore Maritain maintains that Americans were bruised by the past hardships they endured in Europe, which, in turn, led to them fleeing to 'the land of promise' (RA 84). This 'bruising' and suffering led to yet another 'wound', one which caused the American people to be deeply compassionate towards their fellow men, even if this kindness was not immediately apparent to the unobservant, who could see only the surface level of materialism which masked it. This theme is one that Maritain had explored for many years, as far back as the early 1940s : ' En Amérique, où malgré la puissance des grands intérêts économiques la démocratie a pénétré beaucoup plus profondément l'existence, et où elle n'a jamais oublié ses origines chrétiennes, il évoque un instinct vivant, plus fort que les erreurs de l'esprit qui le parasitent'.<sup>19</sup> Besides begetting Christian compassion, this 'wound' also prevented Americans from becoming 'bourgeois' even though they strove for physical comfort to make life easier for themselves, their families and everyone else around them. He even went so far as to speculate that America would be unlikely to ever become bourgeois, because as a country, it had a unique spirit

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Christianisme et démocratie* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2005), p.44. Henceforth *Christianisme et démocratie* (CD)

which prevented it from doing so (RA 193). Instead, he attributed, implicitly, this bourgeois quality to the French, and in doing so revealed a fundamental shift in his position in fifteen years, moving far from where he stood in the early 1940s when he described the French in *Antisemitism* as incapable of petty 'bourgeois' anti-Semitism as they were too in thrall to necessary logic and reason.

Maritain's description of men (like himself) who fled difficulty and danger in Europe and, bruised and wounded, found sanctuary in the United States is intensified by his description of Americans themselves as unsettled, restless travellers. In this way he identified himself closely with the American people. At one and the same time he elevated this characteristic of travelling to represent a perfect example of Christianity (they had 'the Christian sense of the impermanence of earthly things' (RA 94)) and yet also, simultaneously, brings to mind the image of the wandering Jewish people, who had been similarly bruised by their suffering. As we saw in Chapter Three, in *Antisemitism* Maritain advocated that countries with large land mass and small populations (for example, the French colonies and Australia) should welcome those Jews who were being persecuted in their own lands. The parallels he drew between the urgent need for the Jews to populate a largely unknown and new country like Australia and the persecuted religious groups who sought sanctuary in a wild and unexplored America two centuries earlier are clear to see. Maritain's equating of real, genuine Christianity with America can be distinguished at least fifteen years earlier in his pro-Resistance broadcasts on 'Voice of America' and even more notably in 1943's *Christianisme et démocratie*, which he dedicated to the people of France. In the introduction to this work, René Mougel reminded the reader of Maritain's avowed desire to remain politically independent: 'Maritain avait très tôt défini, dans sa Lettre sur l'indépendance, la ligne propre de son action: l'indépendance à l'égard de tout mouvement politique qui lui était une condition

d'exercice de la pensée' (CD 20). Nevertheless, after appeals from de Gaulle in 1942, Maritain appeared to change his mind, saying that he would, in fact, help in a practical sense by setting out 'les éléments d'une idéologie constructive' and that these elements would help guide 'la reconstruction politique et sociale de la France' (CD 20). More prosaically, Maritain was just as likely to be supporting de Gaulle's agenda of bringing America and its huge resources into the Second World War. According to Mougel, Maritain received, via General de Gaulle's staff, a message from an unnamed French citizen requesting that Maritain give 'd'innombrables lecteurs de toutes classes' (CD 19) of his previous book, *A travers le désastre*, one more work to further inspire them. As his theme, Maritain drew on his growing love of America. Thus, in *Christianisme et démocratie* he referred to the United States as an example of a place where the spirit of evangelism, which he saw as an essential part of true democracy, had taken a firm root in everyday life and action: 'la démocratie est liée au christianisme, et [...] la poussée démocratique a surgi dans l'histoire humaine comme une manifestation temporelle de l'inspiration évangélique' (CD 49). Maritain paid homage to the United States, the country of his refuge, repeatedly throughout the work, even quoting from speeches by Roosevelt and Wallace so that he could associate them with extracts from the Sermon on the Mount (CD 63): a very flattering comparison.

### **America as the embodiment of *Humanisme intégral***

Maritain paid America another profound compliment in *Reflections on America* by comparing the country favourably with the blueprint of the perfect democratic society he had portrayed in his most celebrated work, *Humanisme intégral*. He stated that the country presented a 'concrete, existential democracy [...] democracy as a living reality' (RA 161). Just as he did in *Christianisme et démocratie*, he differentiated what he saw as

this true form of democracy from that which he painted as based on the empty words of Rousseau (thus echoing Simon). Instead of over-blown rhetoric, he said, Americans organised democracy at grass-roots level in the very communities in which they lived. This made democracy essentially a pluralist reality, composed of living, breathing micro groups (and so very different from what he called 'individualistic France' (RA 163)). In this portrayal, America appeared as an example of the ideal relationship between the individual and the body politic which he portrayed in *Man and the State*. In addition, the parallels with Alinsky's work are unmistakable at this point. Indeed, Maritain went on to talk about the success of Alinsky's work in Chicago (RA 164), whilst at the same time bemoaning the difficulty of transplanting such ideas to Europe (giving as an example the failed attempts that were made to do this in Italy), because the continent was too bound up in the politics that were strangling it. *Reflections on America* culminates with a blatant comparison of American society with that of the twenty year old *Humanisme intégral*. Of course, at the time of writing the earlier book Maritain maintained that it was France that he had in mind. Yet, on coming to America he insisted that he was struck with such a real fondness for the country that only over time, so he claimed, he came to realise that this was due, at least in part, to the resemblance the country had to the society he had portrayed in *Humanisme intégral*. Thus, he maintained, incredibly and very conveniently, that he could describe *Humanisme intégral* as a work that has 'an affinity with the American climate *by anticipation*' (my italics, RA 175). This climate, he said, contained a true secular pluralism, in which men of different faiths were able to work together for the temporal good (RA 179). And yet, because no individual faith was singled out to be supported by the state, the country was at one and the same time deeply religious in the way it lived ('religiously inspired' (RA 188)) and also at the same time, he claimed, tolerant of all its inhabitants, even atheists (RA 183). In fact, he

asserted, in what could be interpreted as yet another veiled criticism of his native land, French Christians could learn much from the 'Christian vocation of America'. The United States had the capability, he said, to develop 'a new Christendom' (RA 189). Maritain is, of course, being very selective in this portrait; his America is only the white, Christian element. Yet, he went further still and speculated that the ultimate prize could be attained if Europe and America were to come together (a little like his vision for Jews and Christians) to create 'a world of free men penetrated in its secular substance by a real and vital Christianity' (RA 196); one in which the Judeo-Christian tradition could blossom and hope could flourish.

### **Reveille for Radicals: Alinsky's template for grassroots democracy**

In *Reflections on America*, Maritain touched on Alinsky's work in communities and neighbourhoods in Chicago. Almost a decade later in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, Maritain, to the astonishment of many, singled out Alinsky as one of the very few true modern revolutionaries of the present day and one of his closest friends. The surprise was particularly great because the two men appeared to stand at opposite ends of every imaginable spectrum; Alinsky, Jewish but of no particular religious faith, a man of action, direct, and sometimes coarse in his language and confrontational in his behaviour seemed to be cut from a very different cloth from the intellectual, physically fragile, apparently gentle and devoutly Catholic Maritain. Yet their correspondence reveals a deep friendship (for example, they often signed off their letters with protestations of devotion such as 'all of my love'<sup>20</sup>), which resembled, in many ways, the bond of father and son or at least that of kindly and benevolent mentor and spirited and lively mentee. This relationship began at an unspecified point in the early 1940s, not long after

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<sup>20</sup> Doering (ed.), *The Philosopher and the Provocateur*, p.105.



Maritain took refuge in America, and was characterised from the outset by hero worship on the part of Alinsky. In his very first letter to Maritain, despite a self-avowed dislike of sycophancy, Alinsky asked rather coyly for a signed picture, just as any movie fan might ask of a film star.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to reconcile this portrait of Alinsky with the picture of the man who had worked on intensely challenging social projects in the tough back yards of Chicago since the late 1930s. For his part Maritain's role was one of a kindly yet insistent elder, pushing and sometimes even nagging Alinsky to write down his work methods, which he finally did, firstly in *Reveille for Radicals* (published in 1946) and then in *Rules for Radicals* (published in 1971, just before Alinsky's premature death from a heart attack). Among their many letters covering the minutiae of activities of mutual acquaintances and plentiful domestic detail (for example, a discussion on the cost of furniture at Macy's<sup>22</sup>), evidence emerges that each was involved in some way in the work of the other. The English translation of Maritain's *Humanisme intégral* was published in 1938, just as Alinsky began his community work. Although there is no direct evidence that Alinsky read it, it is very likely that he did, as it was well-known in America at the time. *Reveille for Radicals* was written, as Alinsky himself said to Maritain: 'at your personal request and [...] I have a definite agreement with you whereby you have the complete rights of French copyright'.<sup>23</sup> Although Maritain appeared to make some efforts to have the French translation made by Julien Green and Yves Simon, among others, it never came to fruition. As already noted Maritain lauded Alinsky in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and sent him an early copy of the book. Alinsky, in turn, sent Maritain a copy of *Rules for Radicals* with a special dedication which read: 'To my spiritual father

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.9.

and the man I love from his prodigal and wayward son, Saul'.<sup>24</sup> The pertinent question is whether either man had, besides interest and admiration, a direct influence on the other, and if so, how great that influence was. Furthermore, given that both were inclined towards opportunistic behaviour there is also the question of what exactly each gained from the other.

### **Alinsky's version of democracy compared with Maritain's**

In the introduction to the 1969 Vintage edition of *Reveille for Radicals*, Alinsky set out clearly his position in terms of theology and philosophy, which appears radically different from that of Maritain; he says of a free man in society: '[t]ruth to him is relative and changing'.<sup>25</sup> With no fixed truth, asserted Alinsky, there can be no final answers and no dogma but only a constant process of (self) challenge, a construction of a set of probabilities, creativity and a vital curiosity. Despite this attachment to a flexible truth, which is very far from Maritain's belief in an unchanging truth, just a few pages later, he revealed something which appeared to show a deep affinity with Maritain. He discussed the fluidity of social practice, the need to adapt to changing times,<sup>26</sup> and the existence of a set of unchanging principles which underpinned this fluidity: 'full equality for all would be universal [...] a promised land of peace and plenty [...] a world where the Judeo-Christian values [...] would be made real'.<sup>27</sup> Without too many leaps of the imagination, these words could have flowed from the pen of Maritain himself. Maritain said in *Humanisme intégral* that the form of society must be relevant to the time it existed in, and that different systems, cultures and civilisations were valid at various times, with forms growing and developing organically. This changing form of expression of society

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>25</sup> Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p.xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.xv.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.xvii.

was, however, underpinned by an unchanging Thomistic truth. Maritain called this mix of a constant absolute truth and a current manifestation of that truth the 'idéal historique concret', which had 'une essence capable d'existence et appelant l'existence pour un climat historique donné, répondant par suite à un maximum *relatif* [...] de perfection sociale et politique' (HI 140). In the 1930s Maritain saw the expression of this ideal as a 'pluralist commonwealth'; both communal, with people sharing material goods (in contrast to capitalism) and personalist, with respect for that part of the human being that is 'supra-temporal' (in contrast to communism). Thus, from an initial reading of *Reveille for Radicals* and a comparison of it with *Humanisme intégral*, while there appeared to be a fundamental philosophic difference between Alinsky and Maritain, there also seemed to be considerable overlap between the views of the two men on social matters. This is reinforced by Maritain's assertion that *Humanisme intégral* arose from a 'philosophie pratique' which in turn 'reste philosophie, elle reste une connaissance de mode spéculatif ; mais à la différence de la métaphysique et de la philosophie de la nature, elle est ordonnée dès le principe à un objet qui est l'action.....elle est avant tout une science de la liberté' (HI 6).

*Reveille for Radicals* opens with a description of the nature and character of a radical. In unsparingly blunt language, Alinsky dissected what he saw as the secret prejudices that most men have, which he illustrated through a range of groups as diverse as Catholics, Negroes, Poles and Jews, before concluding that it is only the true radical who actually really likes all men without condition. He 'is that unique person who actually believes what he says. He is that person to whom the common good is the greatest personal value [...] who genuinely and completely believes in mankind [...]. He

is completely concerned with fundamental causes rather than current manifestations'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, besides sharing with Maritain a view of the unchanging nature of the way things are beneath their current appearance (almost 'being' itself), Alinsky seemed to have, as did Maritain himself, much in common with the personalist philosophies of the 1930s, which place equal importance on the worth and value of each individual and maintain respect both for that individual's own free will and for the common good, advocating that each person must engage in meaningful and, in all likelihood, different ways with his or her own community. Furthermore, Alinsky distinguished between those he calls liberals ('who like people with their heads') and radicals ('who like people with both their heads and their *hearts*' (his italics)).<sup>29</sup> The parallels with Maritain's 'soft heart' are unmistakable. Even though Alinsky's 'heart' may sing more of passion and practical action and Maritain's more of compassion and words there appears to be, nevertheless, shared tissue.

In *Reveille for Radicals*, Alinsky painted a picture of what for him constituted a real democracy. The first point he made is that people in a community are perfectly capable themselves of deciding what democracy in their locality should look like. They have no need of an organiser to do that for them; in fact, such top-down direction from an organiser would show 'lack of faith in the ability and intelligence of the masses of people to think their way through to the successful solution of their problems'.<sup>30</sup> At this point, a parallel can be made and yet also a contrast drawn with *Man and the State*, in that Maritain saw a role for the philosopher as a guide to others (see his comments about the American people earlier in this chapter as well as Chapter Two's discussion of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*). The second point Alinsky made about the nature of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.55.

democracy concerned the interrelated nature of social problems and how an issue in one area, for example youth crime, should not be divorced from a host of others, for example, housing.<sup>31</sup> As he said, 'the problems of life are not wrapped up in individual cellophane packages'<sup>32</sup> and any attempt to solve pieces of a puzzle can only be the misguided attempt by some 'do-gooder' (or, worse, 'people who wallow in their egos as self-anointed saviours of the people'<sup>33</sup>) to solve, in a very directive way, a presenting symptom rather than the actual cause. Furthermore, as a third point, he stated that leadership is usually not vested solely in one person, even if that individual is a key part of his community. Rather, leadership is fragmented and dispersed; the community goes to different people for a variety of needs and there are a number of 'partial leaders or leaders of small groups'.<sup>34</sup> The role of the organiser, rather than being some kind of dictator, is rather one of finding and identifying these 'partial' leaders and then supporting and nurturing their talent and influence so that they can take on even more for the common good. A further principle of democracy, in Alinsky's view, was its relativity, in that it was firmly rooted in the customs and traditions, including the morality and the religion, of its people. One size, most certainly, does not fit all, and any organiser who does not grasp this principle is doomed to failure (for example, Alinsky said, while drinking and gambling may be acceptable in a Catholic community such a culture did not transfer readily to a traditional Protestant people). In addition, Alinsky described the complexity of the individuals who make up such a community. They had, he said, 'a whole series of loyalties',<sup>35</sup> to such things as their church, their union and their political party. True democracy recognises these subtleties and caters for them.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.86.

This is about as far away from totalitarianism as one can get and this rejection of it is something that Alinsky shares with Maritain. In summary, Alinsky presented radicals, who were often but not always the organisers of democracies, as people who recognised and accepted the complexities presented by a community, did not take setbacks personally and accepted and even welcomed, in a pragmatic fashion, the frailties, including evil, which might be present in both individual men and in society at large. Acceptance was necessary, he said, because ‘moral malignancy’ was often learned from the society in which the individuals grew up.<sup>36</sup>

Many of Alinsky’s principles are very similar to those Maritain espoused in *Humanisme intégral*. Maritain discussed the reengagement of the ‘masses’ in religion and active participation of the working man in the creation and ownership of his means of economic support. While no political party was endorsed, a strong theme of *Humanisme intégral* was its intense criticism of communism (which, according to Maritain, in its rejection of the bourgeois, capitalist, calcified Christian world, also made the fundamental error of rejecting Christ). This criticism stayed with Maritain into the 1950s and the time of writing *Reflections on America*. He advanced some practical suggestions in *Humanisme intégral* for creating a form of society but his detail (as is often the case in his work) was sketchy. In contrast, while building on similar foundations, Alinsky spent a large part of *Reveille for Radicals* outlining, via detailed examples, tactics for building a democracy and the psychological influencing strategies needed to make this democracy work. These he distinguished from ‘manipulation’, as he insisted that the underlying motivation of the organiser was to work for the common good, to believe in the people he served and to be inspired by a mutual goal ‘so good and so bright that it is not important if one must go through a few devious valleys and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.92.

shadows in the struggle for the people's world'.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Maritain, Alinsky saw no rules of fair play in the battle to get what was right for the people; after all, he said, '[a] war is not an intellectual debate'<sup>38</sup> and democracy did not 'live comfortably and serenely in an ivory tower' but in 'a world of hard reality'.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, the struggle was to achieve what he called several times 'the dignity of man',<sup>40</sup> a phrase that chimed strongly with personalist philosophies and with that of Maritain himself. Thus, although their approaches and their styles were different, the core of their social beliefs was very similar. Indeed, at the very end of the work Alinsky quoted Maritain, drawing on the English translation of *Christianisme et Démocratie*, in which Maritain stated that it is not organised bodies who champion the rights of man (for example, it was not the Catholic Church but 'rationalists' who were in the foreground of the French Revolution).<sup>41</sup> This led Alinsky to his final message: organised institutions did not prevent the recent World War and it was only through harnessing the power and strength of all people that 'peace, security and happiness' could be found.<sup>42</sup>

Alinsky wrote an afterward to the Vintage Edition in 1969. In this, he placed more stress on general ethical principles than he did in the main body of the book. He stated that although democracy was achieved in different ways to suit the particular needs of a community, he was certainly not advocating anarchy to achieve it. There were, he said, 'certain common ethical definitions' and 'open-ended systems of ethics and values',<sup>43</sup> which maintain stability, yet prevent stagnation, and also allow for constant adaptation to the changing needs to the community. These words echo those

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.130.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.135.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.175.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.207.

of Maritain: a changing social structure based on an unchanging truth. However, Alinsky maintained, these systems have to be firmly rooted in reality and must be workable rather than being based solely on unrealistic aspiration. Quoting Tocqueville, Alinsky said that 'in the last analysis democracy is preserved and strengthened by maintaining differences and variations'.<sup>44</sup> This evoked the pluralist society advocated by Maritain. Significantly, Alinsky turned to the role of the Catholic Church in championing such changes. It should be 'a vital catalyst' and play an important role in 'the creation of those political, social, and economic circumstances whereby people will have the ability to act and the power to operate as free citizens in a free society'.<sup>45</sup> In the closing lines of the *Afterward*, Alinsky gave a statement which showed exactly how much he had in common with Maritain. Faith and logic, he said, were intertwined. They were 'opposite sides of the same shield', (and the use of the word 'shield' evokes the two swords of Maritain's *Primauté du Spirituel*), where intelligence tells us how to recognise a free society and faith allows us to '*see it when we believe it*' (Alinsky's italics).<sup>46</sup>

As already noted, Alinsky wrote *Reveille for Radicals* at Maritain's urging. What then did Maritain make of the work? In brief, he said it was 'epoch-making'<sup>47</sup> and a conduit to real and true democracy; and not that false democracy offered by totalitarianism. He expressed admiration of Alinsky's understanding of human nature, especially the dark side, which Alinsky had gained, perhaps, as a result of his work as a criminologist, and lauded his spirit of optimism, which he said was the same as that of Christ.<sup>48</sup> Most fundamentally, he exclaimed: 'You are a Thomist, dear Saul, a practical

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.218.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.223.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>47</sup> Doering (ed.), *The Philosopher and the Provocateur*, p.11.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



Thomist!';<sup>49</sup> what greater praise could there be from Maritain? Thus we have two complementary Thomists: the ideological and the practical. Alinsky showed himself to be completely humble in the face of such a compliment, saying in his letter of answer that Maritain's good opinion, along with that of only one or two others, was all that mattered to him in the world: 'I don't care what anyone else thinks'.<sup>50</sup> As well as granting Maritain the rights of French publication of the book, he even permitted him to change the text as he saw fit. This more than anything, shows the extent of their mutual influence. Alinsky said with passion that he would cherish this French edition even more than the original English version. He asked for the French royalties to be used to cover Maritain's expenses, then after that to buy flowers for Raïssa every week and finally for anything left over to be used to support those French causes 'which are dedicated to the principles in which we believe',<sup>51</sup> a heartfelt admission of all he and Maritain had in common. Maritain, in turn, stated in his review of the book which appeared in the New York Post that it was 'specifically American' and 'deep-rooted in a specifically American tradition',<sup>52</sup> because of its emphasis on the importance of both community life and at the same time also of individual endeavour. Yet, he said, it also 'conveys a message to all freedom-loving men',<sup>53</sup> wherever they lived. We learn through one of Alinsky's letters to Maritain that 'the reviews in the Catholic Press have been phenomenal',<sup>54</sup> but that he was wary of those Catholics who embraced the work merely because they believed that it offered an alternative to communism (the question surely arises whether Maritain, in his opposition to communism, saw this opportunity in Alinsky himself). Alinsky stated that he intended to work with the communists as much as with other groups (even

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.29.

despite criticism of the book by the communist party in America). Alinsky, ever the pragmatist, was happy to work with anyone who could help him meet his objectives and was very reluctant to be seized on as a symbol for any one political stance. This echoes what Maritain wrote in the mid 1930s about the independence of the philosopher. Yet Alinsky actually proved to be the mirror image of Maritain who wanted to stay true to his chosen apolitical way of operating yet ended up being adopted by different factions, like Action Française, to serve their purpose. Alinsky strove to see the best in men of all persuasions; 'the human, really spiritual values, apparent in both the Communist and Catholic priest through the Nazi ordeal made a tremendous impression upon me'.<sup>55</sup> This brings back echoes of Catholics and communists working together during the war, a state that did not last beyond the late 1940s. While Alinsky's desire for a position of political objectivity mirrored Maritain's own avowed stance of the 1930s, by the 1950s Maritain himself was far less favourably disposed towards communism than Alinsky was and, as a result, was more in tune with the general American (and official Catholic) attitude of intense fear of the perceived communist threat.

### **Maritain's changing attitude towards France**

Throughout *Reflections on America* Maritain's hardening of attitude towards the land of his birth becomes ever more apparent. In fifteen years he had moved from lauding the French for their heroism (albeit in the somewhat emotional and overblown language of war-time broadcasts), and excusing them for any anti-semitic behaviour, whilst at the same time drawing on the example of America as a template of active Christianity which the French might find useful to follow, to accusations of French cynical and malicious intellectualism, overworked individualism, empty rhetoric, stifling politics, a superior

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

attitude and a lack of openness. The picture he painted of France in the 1950s was far from flattering, and may well be one that contributed, along with his physical absence from the country during that decade, to the weakening of his reputation in his native land. France was welcoming back de Gaulle in 1958, the year *Reflections on America* appeared, and de Gaulle's anti-American stance is well-known. Thus, as well as alienating the French through harsh criticism Maritain embraced instead a country which many of his countrymen detested. It was as if Maritain had to denigrate France to make America shine even more brightly; yet it is far from clear why he felt the need to do this. The more generous reader might say that this apparent shift of alliances could be interpreted as the fact that, as time marched on, Maritain saw merely a different representation of the perfect Christian spirit, which, in turn, reflected one of his core beliefs in the permanence of 'being' which manifests itself with fluidity in changing guises at different times. Perhaps a less charitable explanation for what appeared to be his support of America over France was that it was some form of revenge. Having been coaxed by de Gaulle into deploying highly-charged wartime messages from America, relations between the two men cooled, firstly as a result of de Gaulle insisting that Maritain went to Rome, against his own wishes, at the end of the war and secondly because de Gaulle himself had to make considerable concessions to the communists, who were in a very strong position post-war. Maritain was unhappy with both developments and may have even felt abandoned by de Gaulle. Adding to this sourness of feeling might be what Michael Kelly calls the 'nationalisation of French intellectuals' after the war: '[t]heir challenge was to produce the ideas, images and stories which could knit French people together in an imagined community, which they could share,

and which could be presented to France's international partners'.<sup>56</sup> Sartre was one of these French 'diplomats' and he made many trips to America. Maritain, of course, was excluded from such activity as he was in Rome as the reluctant French Papal ambassador. Yet another possible explanation, again at odds with the first, is pure opportunism, which gave Maritain the chance to ingratiate himself with his already admiring American audience. As has been noted many times, while Maritain always held steadfastly to his Thomistic position in matters of the spirit, in the social and temporal world he formed and changed alliances (his dealings with the Action Française in the 1920s spring to mind), and he was often open to finding excuses for behaviour which did not suit his current argument and position (as in the cases of French anti-Semitism and American racism, as shown earlier in this chapter and previous chapters). These facts revealed him to have a constantly shifting position on temporal matters: one that appeared to be inspired by the underlying principles of social justice for all and the vision of a pluralist, tolerant society as seen in *Humanisme intégral*, but also one whose current exemplar was always undefined, never certain and open, as a result, to manipulation, by him and by others. This vagueness of definition was made even hazier by his desire to attempt to converge different groups and tie them tightly together, whenever it suited his purpose (for example, as explored in Chapter Three, note his desire to equate the suffering of Jews with that of Christ and less explicitly, as shown in this chapter, his comparison of the persecution of the wandering Jews with the sufferings of early American immigrants). Even if Maritain himself was not actively manipulating his message, in leaving it vague enough to be tailored to whatever purpose he wished to achieve, his vision of society was sufficiently open for him to be held up to

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Kelly, 'The nationalisation of French intellectuals in 1945', *South Central Review*, 17 (2000), 14-25 (p.15).

represent a range of different causes at various points of history and to be interpreted by different groups to suit their own ends. This theme is explored further in Chapter Six.

### ***Le Paysan de la Garonne*: French and American reactions**

In *Le Paysan de la Garonne* Maritain did not highlight any differences between French and American society. Instead, he concentrated on matters that transcended geographical boundaries, such as theology, philosophy and the spiritual world of the Second Vatican Council. The book sold well, even topping the best seller list in France. Here, where Mass attendance was dwindling, many people still called themselves Catholics, and had much to say about a book that examined modern-day Catholicism (Robert Gildea stated that even in 1981 81% of the French people called themselves Catholic, and although this did not mean necessarily that they participated in Church life, they still wanted to belong to 'a community with a common culture and a common system of beliefs, constructed over the course of French history'<sup>57</sup>). As indicated in Chapter Two, *Le Paysan de la Garonne* received a very mixed critical reaction and even praise was underpinned with criticism, or at best, with sentiments of sadness and regret. Although much of the adverse comment shared the same themes, subtle differences between French and American reviews became apparent. Whilst the Americans on the whole focused on what they regarded as the lamentable tone of the book, French commentary comprised not only this, but also posed a question: had Maritain reneged on the principles of *Humanisme intégral*?

A clear example of typical American reaction can be seen in the article 'Peasant of the Garonne: Two views' which appeared in 1968. In the first of these 'views'

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<sup>57</sup> Gildea, *France since 1945*, p.164.

(‘Shooting fish in a barrel’), Kenneth Rexroth voiced criticism, firstly of the style, which he saw as ‘so vague, not so much too general or abstract, as amorphous, diffuse, wandering, disoriented as to time, person, place and thing.....nothing is ever mentioned specifically’<sup>58</sup> and secondly of the tone, which he described as ‘random, rhetorical abuse’. <sup>59</sup> Speaking of Maritain’s statements that ‘[i]t is impossible to be an idealist and a Christian’ and ‘a Christian cannot be a relativist’ he commented: ‘[r]emarks like these are as vulgar as any bingo game’. <sup>60</sup> The second view, (‘Jacques Maritain’s Yes-But No!’) advanced by William Clancy, also starts off on a negative note, calling the book ‘an affront to the age’, showing a Maritain who was ‘impatient, caustic and angry’. <sup>61</sup> However, Clancy went on to highlight how in tune he believed the book actually was with Maritain’s previous works, singling out three recurrent themes which he believed were also strongly present in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*: the need for Christians to live in the world but not be of the world, the acknowledgement that human reason can come to some knowledge of that truth which is God, and the Church ‘as the eternal and divine scandal -the stumbling block- which can be grasped and gratefully received only through faith and prayer’. <sup>62</sup> Clancy acknowledged that, thanks to Maritain, these were truths that he grew up with, and that Maritain was only telling the exact same truths once more; but to readers ‘in our new sophistication’. <sup>63</sup> However, Clancy, like many others, believed that Maritain undermined his ‘truths’ through both the book’s harsh tone and its general dismissal of almost every modern scholar, theologian and philosopher. He

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<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, and William Clancy, ‘Two views: The Peasant of the Garonne’, *Commonweal* Vol. 88 No.1 (1968), 106-110 (p.106).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.,p.107.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.,p.108.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

also took issue with Maritain's 'pendulum theory of history',<sup>64</sup> which explained the current secularisation of religion as a reaction to the Manicheistic contempt of the world which had lasted into the twentieth century. Ultimately, Clancy's conclusion was that the book was saved by its restatement of vital themes spoken with 'seriousness, urgency and love',<sup>65</sup> and, perhaps somewhat sentimentally, by the general debt of thanks owed to Maritain 'the man of faith and wisdom'.<sup>66</sup> Frederick Busi, writing in 1970, agreed with Clancy that the book reinforced Maritain's usual themes. In fact Busi appeared to regard the book as providing a magnifying, rather than a distorting, mirror to Maritain's previous work. He said that the reader might need to 'consider this book's puzzling message not as an aberration, but rather as an exaggeration of philosophical tendencies which may not have been fully appreciated by those for whom Maritain's thoughts were a beacon of hope during the darkest period of the last generation'.<sup>67</sup> This theme of convergence and magnification of message surfaced also in Molnar's article, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne'; although, in his view, as already mentioned, Maritain did not achieve a consistency of message and could never fuse together his philosophy and politics convincingly which denied him true greatness.<sup>68</sup> Writing in 1967, the Irish cleric Brendan Devlin, echoing these points, expressed his view that the work 'sets an example both of Christianity and scholarship',<sup>69</sup> but attributed the hostility it had attracted to its tendency towards sarcasm, the extreme nature of its positions, its attacks on the muddling of theology and philosophy, especially by Thomists, and the dismissal of modern philosophy. He finished by highlighting Maritain's assertion that the task of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.110.

<sup>67</sup> Frederick Busi, 'The Sadness of Jacques Maritain', *Religion in Life*, Vol. 39 (1970), 407-412 (p.407).

<sup>68</sup> Molnar, 'Le Paysan de la Garonne', p.370.

<sup>69</sup> Brendan Devlin, Untitled Review, *The Furrow*, 12 (1967), 729-731 (p. 729).

‘retrieving the situation’<sup>70</sup> would be down to just a small number of people, as only a few were capable of recognising the truth, lamenting that ‘this form of intellectual snobbery recurs again and again in the book’.<sup>71</sup> Devlin finished by stating that the book’s real achievement, something that was not to be dismissed as unimportant in itself, was to engender disquiet in its readers - which uncomfortable change had a tendency to do.

Busi talked of the book stirring up a controversy in Europe, yet did not include America in this supposed storm. In general, French reaction to the work seemed far more extreme. As well as objecting to the style and tone, it focused on a consideration of the book’s position in relation to *Humanisme intégral*. Unlike Clancy and Molnar, who claimed to find in *Le Paysan de la Garonne* a reflection of themes that went before, many French critics questioned whether Maritain had, in fact, ‘sold out’ his earlier position. In his 1968 article, after a decent interval of time, as he saw it, for the initial heated controversy to have died down, Henry Bars, Maritain’s old friend, attempted to answer some of the ‘insults’ levied against Maritain. He focused on three of the French criticisms which had arisen frequently in the wake of the book’s publication, first among these: ‘Maritain s’est-il déjugé et spécialement a-t-il renié *Humanisme intégral*, dont certains de ses adversaires d’aujourd’hui se recommandaient jusqu’à présent?’.<sup>72</sup> Maritain himself, as we have already seen in Chapter Two, believed the works to be consistent with one another and Bars shared this view. Commenting that some supporters of *Humanisme intégral* had admired it, not for its philosophical underpinning, but merely for its solutions to the practical issues of that time, Bars concluded that as the particular issues had changed, so the supporters had turned to

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.130.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Bars, ‘A propos du « Paysan de la Garonne »’ *Revue Thomiste*, Vol. 66 (1968), 89-100 (p.89).



different solutions. However, perhaps an even more fundamental question is why French opinion found it so important to seek to establish a link between the two books in the first place.

Up until the Papal condemnation of Action Française in 1926, Maritain's writings had rarely taken a social or political tone. The rise of fascism and the economic collapse of the early 1930s had resulted, eventually and after much strife, in what Julian Jackson describes as 'a growing desire for left-wing unity'<sup>73</sup> and the election of the Popular Front under Leon Blum in 1936. Hard on the heels of this was the Spanish Civil War, when it became, as Stuart Hughes said in 1966: 'impossible for Catholics to remain neutral observers of the social and ideological struggle [...] [t]hinkers who through training or temperament had adopted a stance of detachment were forced to take sides'.<sup>74</sup> In France, he said, the result was, ultimately, a group that presented an independent and almost uniquely Catholic rejection of Franco's cause, which in turn led to political and social leanings to the left.<sup>75</sup> These leanings were strengthened by a mission to 'rechristianize the poorer classes'<sup>76</sup> (possibly as a result of the divorce of Church and state in 1905, and the need to find support from a source other than the bourgeois establishment), and the worker-priest movement. It was against this backdrop, in 1936, the same year as the election of the Popular Front, that Maritain wrote *Humanisme intégral*, the work that led to him, as a Catholic at a time when Catholicism generally invoked right-wing leanings, being regarded as a leading figure in French democratic political and social policy.

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<sup>73</sup> Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.6.

<sup>74</sup> Stuart Hughes, 'Marcel, Maritain and the Secular World', *American Scholar*, 35, (1966), 728-732 (p.729).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.730.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, these left-leaning democratic preferences of the mid 1930s which were attributed to Maritain became, perhaps, part of the story that France wanted or needed to tell about itself after the Second World War. This enabled some of the history of the intervening years to be swept conveniently under the carpet as the narrative was reinvented. This illustrated what Gildea called, in a more general context, the building of a 'myth [...] of a past constructed collectively by a community in such a way as to serve the political claims of that community'<sup>77</sup> and a 'collective amnesia about certain events'.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, as Jackson highlights in the preface to his book François Mitterrand described his 1981 election as the third stage of a journey; the first being the rise of the Popular Front and the second the Liberation. Jackson describes the attempts of Blum in 1937 to build 'a possible collaboration between Catholics and the Popular Front' in which he was supported by 'leading liberal Catholic personalities',<sup>79</sup> including Maritain himself. In actual fact, it was the apparently pro-Catholic stance of the Vichy government which was greeted with enthusiasm by factions on the right, such as Action Française, who saw it as a necessary conservative re-balancing of the days of the Popular Front and a recouping of ground lost by the 1905 separation of Church and State. Larkin comments that 'the majority of committed Catholics, of both left- and right-wing sympathies, began with favourable expectations of Vichy'.<sup>80</sup> Even when these hopes were dashed by Nazi and Vichy government policy, loyalty to Pétain, the hero of Verdun, and the fear of communism ensured that 'the bulk of the population [...] continued to keep their heads down'.<sup>81</sup> While highlighting individual acts of bravery, Larkin contended that the Vichy government, under no initial pressure from Germany,

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<sup>77</sup> Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.10.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>79</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p.261.

<sup>80</sup> Larkin, *France since the Popular Front*, p.93.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.104.

embarked on an anti-semitic programme 'on its own initiative'.<sup>82</sup> Paxton uses even stronger language about the attitude of Catholics to Pétain's government, saying 'few groups found revenge sweeter than the French clergy and the faithful, nursing long grudges against the results of the French Revolution and against sixty years of official republican anticlericalism'.<sup>83</sup>

Robert Speaight, who is generally positive about *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, observed that the tone of the book is 'very French', saying that '[o]ne feels Péguy and Bloy and the *Celle qui pleure* of La Salette behind it'<sup>84</sup> (La Salette is the site of a 1846 appearance by Our Lady, who was venerated by many including Bloy, and Raïssa Maritain herself, as a suffering, sorrowful and distressed incarnation, in contrast to the sunnier vision of Lourdes). Larkin said, after the war that '[t]here was a sense in which everyone who had lived through the Occupation was vicariously under scrutiny'.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, a book that, rather than focusing on the politically and socially liberal mid 1930s (even though Maritain himself emphasised the link between *Le Paysan de la Garonne* and *Humanisme intégral*), appeared, even superficially, to take France away from its new myth about itself and back to the time of a conservative Catholic Church, with echoes of Action Française, the Vichy government and anti-Semitism, was likely to be unsettling to French readers. This was a place where few wanted to go and did not venture for another thirty years (see Chapter Six). Furthermore, Maritain himself had been associated with the fringes of Action Française in the 1920s before acquiring his reputation for more liberal political and social policy. If Maritain, venerated as a symbolic French figure, was seen (or was even assumed to be seen), a mere twenty

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), p.149.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Speaight, 'Jacques Maritain's Apologia', *The Tablet* (Feb.1971), 174-175 (p.175).

<sup>85</sup> Larkin, *France since the Popular Front*, p.103.

years after the end of the Second World War, to be repudiating or at least questioning his earlier work in such a public way, what were the implications for France's view of itself and its reputation?

By contrast, as already seen, Maritain's career in the United States did not take off until the early 1940s when he took refuge and it was there, in the English language which he used to flesh out and develop his thoughts that he found a new inspiration for his vision of democracy. With the exception of his time as French ambassador to the Vatican after the Second World War, Maritain wrote and worked, almost exclusively in English, in the United States for two decades. There was no single clear reason why he did not return to France during this period, but besides the adulation he was receiving in America, possible causes might include the fragmented politics of the period in France, when according to Larkin 'the hopes and ideals of the Resistance parties evaporated'.<sup>86</sup> In addition, culturally, the prominence of existentialism and a focus on the meaninglessness of the world, the individual's place in it and the view of man as a mere cog in a machine, were not ideas that would necessarily find favour with Maritain, despite his protestations in the late 1940s that he was the champion of true existentialism (see Chapter Four). His return in 1961 happened soon after the return to power of de Gaulle, (leading to a period of relative stability and security for the Catholic Church in France), with whom, despite many differences, Maritain shared, perhaps inherited from Bergson, a belief in the necessity of man's intuition (Larkin said that de Gaulle said that the French 'had too much intelligence and too little intuition'<sup>87</sup>). During the 1940s and 1950s Maritain had built a revered reputation in the American post Second World War Catholic revival, where articulate spokespeople were needed. Even in

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.151.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.280.

1966, five years after leaving the United States, he was still held in high esteem. In contrast he had become, at best, irrelevant in France and, at worst, through publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, a potential embarrassment if he were now seen to break links with *Humanisme intégral*, a work intensely important to France's vision of itself.

### **Maritain's impact on modern day America: Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton**

As shown earlier in this chapter, Maritain had not only a very close friendship with Alinsky but also had a measure of influence on at least Alinsky's first work of significance, *Reveille for Radicals*. In turn, Alinsky has been credited with influencing both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Therefore, a thread of Maritain's social philosophy appears to extend into modern day America.

Obama was not even in his teens when Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* was published in 1971. Yet its influence on him is clear and well-documented. In the mid 1980s as a young man he taught Alinsky's methods for several years at the University of Chicago and worked as a community organiser in the city. He has never attempted to excuse this involvement and still fondly talks of those times. Therefore, both admirers and, especially, critics of Obama watch for references to Alinsky, even if the President does not directly quote him. An interesting recent example is Obama's speech to young students in Jerusalem, delivered in March 2013, in which he said that Israel has the wisdom to see the world as it is, but also the courage to see the world as it should be. This was reported widely in the media as a direct reference to Alinsky where the latter says in *Rules for Radicals* that 'it is necessary to begin where the world is if we are going to change it to what we think it should be. That means working in the system.'<sup>88</sup> The

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<sup>88</sup> Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), prologue p.xix.

parallels are of course plain to see, but it is still open to speculation how much Alinsky's works guide the President's actual policies.

Obama has had a lifetime's involvement with the Catholic Church, although he never joined it and began to drift away from it when his political career took off in the late 1980s. This relationship is documented in Jason Horowitz's recent article in the *New York Times*, entitled 'The Catholic Roots of Obama's Activism'.<sup>89</sup> During his time as a community organiser in Chicago, according to Horowitz, Obama was well-known in black Catholic circles and as his first post was sponsored by a Church grant he worked from a Church office with Church members. He became heavily involved in matters of Church social justice and read Catholic texts. The article tells us that he was mentored by Gregory Galluzzo, 'a former Jesuit priest and disciple of the organizer Saul Alinsky'. This brings together a variety of influences including, quite possibly, Maritain. In more recent years, especially as the Catholic Church tightened social policies through St Pope John Paul II and especially Pope Benedict XVI, Obama found relations with the Vatican to be somewhat cool. However, the arrival of Pope Francis has led to speculation that the frost may thaw. Indeed the meeting between the two men in March 2014 supports this hope. The *Times* commented on Pope Francis's close affinity with the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who presided over the Church in Chicago when Obama was there. The meeting between Obama and Pope Francis appeared to be a success. Although the two men did not agree on everything ('he [the Pope] has marked the President's card'<sup>90</sup>) they seemed to find common ground in the Pope's priority of serving the poor and they

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<sup>89</sup> Jason Horowitz, 'The Catholic Roots of Obama's Activism' in *The New York Times* (March 22 2014). <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/us/the-catholic-roots-of-obamas-activism.html> [accessed May 4th 2014].

<sup>90</sup> Paul Vallely, 'Why the Pope is sprinkling stardust on Obama' in *The Times* (March 28 2014) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article4047118.ece> [accessed May 4th 2014].

appeared friendly and relaxed in one another's company. The article claims that Obama has even more to gain than the Pope from a close working relationship, with access to a world-wide community (note the Pope's recent global initiative on eliminating people trafficking). Valley goes on to say Obama also 'clearly hopes a little of the stardust of the People's Pope will rub off on him'. There seem to be indications that the Pope and the American President have an understanding, helped surely by Obama's time as a student of Alinsky and his immersion in the social side of Catholicism, inspired by Maritain.

Although Hillary Rodham Clinton's senior thesis submitted to Wellesley College was written in 1969 before Alinsky published his second work *Rules for Radicals* in 1971, it anticipated its themes, building on material that she gathered from her interviews with Alinsky. Her thesis presents a detailed analysis and critique of Alinsky's working model. This document became highly controversial after her husband entered the White House and has provoked reactions of suspicion and sometimes even of extreme hostility, even greater than those accorded to Obama, as it has been held up as 'proof' of her radical tendencies. During her husband's presidency, the thesis was kept under lock and key. Even in 2014 it is still difficult to find a copy to read in its entirety. The document sets out what Alinsky did and what he achieved and is illustrated both by case studies on his projects and by detail gained from her two meetings with Alinsky. Ultimately, Clinton concludes that Alinsky's work was doomed to eventual failure because of its very reliance for success on small, local group action which is impossible to replicate on a larger scale, through, for example, a national movement (interestingly Maritain was edging towards a similar conclusion when he commented on the difficulties of transporting Alinsky's methods wholesale to Italy). A further reason for difficulty, she claims, is the impossibility of duplicating Alinsky himself, especially the

powerful strength of his personality: 'he is a man of exceptional charm', <sup>91</sup> she comments (interestingly, one of the ways in which this 'charm' manifested itself, in her view, was Alinsky's apparent ability to give himself over totally to whoever he was with, keeping a total focus on them to the exclusion of all else; this is a characteristic that many people were later also to attribute to Bill Clinton). In her acknowledgements at the beginning of the thesis, she reveals that Alinsky offered her a job, which she declined. Clearly, she made a very favourable impression on him. In the body of the work, Clinton claims that Alinsky's motivation for starting the Chicago Back of the Yards project was lit by a desire to fight fascism (again an area where he would have found common ground with Maritain). She outlines his typical methods (which have been discussed earlier in this chapter); for example, the importance of a quick adaptation to the local prevailing 'culture', the discovery of what people on the ground think, hope and feel, the spotting and nurturing of local leaders and the mobilisation of cash and other resources from within the community in order to be in a position to take local ownership of the situation and, from this place of strength, firm and decisive action. However, Clinton claims that Alinsky's methods evolved over time and by the late 1960s, at the time she was writing her thesis, were markedly different. This, she says, was brought about by the changing face of society. In summary, as the established communities of the 1930s and 1940s broke down because increased transport opportunities and new kinds of job opened up geographical boundaries and they became replaced by 'mushrooming suburbs', there was no local decision-making body clearly apparent, and even more significantly, no single enemy for people to mobilise against. Alinsky, she says, had to find different methods of appeal. With his usual pragmatism, this led to his targeting of the aspiring middle classes, who had been mostly ignored or scorned by 1960s radicals;

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<sup>91</sup> Hillary Rodham, 'There is only the fight....an analysis of the Alinsky model.' Thesis submitted to Wellesley College, 1969 (no page numbers).



as Clinton says: 'The middle class is fertile ground for organizing and, Alinsky thinks, radicalizing'. Clinton describes the sophisticated methods through which the middle classes might become radicalised for example, the influencing of voters at shareholders' meetings, or attacks on tax law. In *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky described in detail the position and motivation of the middle classes, calling them, in typically robust style 'the Have-a-Little, Want Mores [...] [y]et in the conflicting interests and contradictions within the Have-a-Little, Want Mores, is the genesis of creativity. Out of this class have come, with few exceptions, the great world leaders of change of the past centuries'.<sup>92</sup> In addition, Alinsky planned to develop organizers from the middle class. In an appendix to her thesis, Clinton attached a letter from Alinsky which set out clearly and in great detail the terms of how such training was to be offered; it appeared to be based on a quasi-University with visiting faculty, was residential in Chicago for up to forty trainees at a time, was scheduled over fifteen months, and had trainees targeted for 'work in middle class communities', studying alongside those destined for work with the poor. However, she concludes that '[t]here are still too many inequalities in our system for political scientists or demonstrating students to adopt the "doing one's own thing" theory of participation'. Alinsky, while in her view a radical, could never dominate the world-wide or even the national stage. This was just not compatible with his method of working, even at the peak of his influence in the 1950s: '[o]perating with territorially defined assumptions, he applied his model to poor areas all over the world. There is little information regarding the actual organizing situations between 1946 and 1960, and Alinsky is vague about them'. However, that Maritain was always there, encouraging Alinsky in his endeavours, even if they turned out to be unsuccessful, was never in doubt in Clinton's mind. As she says: 'Alinsky often worked through the Catholic Church and at

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<sup>92</sup> Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, p.19.

the urging of his friend Jacques Maritain even consulted with the Vatican about development problems in Southern Italy'. This suggests that Alinsky needed Maritain and was happy to use his influence to meet his aims.

In summary, even though she may be forever associated with Alinsky and his radicalism in the minds of some sections of the American public, there is no conclusive evidence that Alinsky influenced Clinton's politics in later years in any meaningful way. However, in her thesis there is obvious evidence of her admiration for the man, someone she spent considerable time with, and for the work he did in local communities. In Obama's case, although he never met Alinsky, there is an even clearer link as, unlike Clinton who declined the opportunity, he worked on the community projects inspired by Alinsky and even taught his methods. Yet again, apart from the occasional veiled reference to Alinsky there is little to suggest a direct influence on Obama's presidential policies. However, it is entirely possible that both Clinton and Obama followed one of Alinsky's key maxims 'the ends justify the means' where the end is power and the means is whatever policy it takes to gain power. If this were true, it would, of course, be difficult to spot Alinsky's chameleon-like way of working in the methods of either Clinton or Obama; that is the very point of such methods.

### **Conclusion: Maritain as a 'French-Atlantic' thinker**

There is no doubt that Maritain's reputation is now more revered in the United States (and in Canada and South America) than it is in his native France. The University of Notre Dame has an extensive facility dedicated to him (the Jacques Maritain Center) while there is no equivalent in France. Even at a time of great crisis for his reputation, after the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, critics outside France and in America in particular, were kinder and more generous to him than those of the country of his birth.

The likely reasons for this polarised reputation are many and varied. Firstly, there is the simple fact that Maritain spent two decades in America, and when he returned to France, society and the world had changed and he found himself largely forgotten. During his time in the United States he wrote, with the exception of his broadcasts during the Second World War, in English, meaning that the penetration of his work in France was limited. Conversely, this allowed him to make a bigger impact in America than some of de Gaulle's 'diplomats'. Secondly, his rather sycophantic writings on the United States appear, not surprisingly, to have endeared him to the American public. Furthermore, he drew on France unsuitably as a point of contrast to the wonders of America, which would have hardly made his reputation soar in his native land, especially given de Gaulle's dislike of America, which was echoed by many Frenchmen, and in the mood of political and financial tensions between France and America in the post Second World War period. And rather than being an ambassador for a certain radical France like, say, Sartre, he seemed at times to scorn it and almost to try and damage its reputation to his American audience (who would no doubt have enjoyed the picture that he painted).

Perhaps even more fundamental is the question of the relationship between religion and politics in America and France. Although both are secular countries, the relationships are entirely different. In France, although many people would claim that they are Catholics, nominally at least, religion has been pushed to the sidelines. In America, while no single religion plays a part in politics, the many different churches are interwoven into day to day life. This pluralist democracy, in which each man discovers and defends his own truth (in Maritain's case Catholic), is the one which he insisted inspired *Humanisme intégral*, even if such an influence, by an implausible stretch of logic, could only be retrospective. Maritain's social and political philosophies were much

more at home in the United States and he made no secret of this. Thus, by result of congruence of view and belief, his lack of past 'baggage' in the United States (for example, his involvement with Action Française was irrelevant there) and Maritain's own promotion of his 'fit' with American society, he came to hold an honoured place in it. His ability to network well and to keep up correspondence and acquaintance with influential figures, as well as his close friendship with Alinsky, helped to cement this place and keeps him fresh today in the United States. He may even have had actual influence on current thinking.

Chapter Six will consider and evaluate what legacy Maritain has to leave to France and will also assess what relevance he has fifty years after the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* for a Catholic Church that now has a Pope from South America, where Maritain is still widely read. As part of this assessment, what he has bequeathed to Catholic-Jewish relations will be evaluated. A number of key questions will be considered: is Maritain portrayed in whatever way people want him to be portrayed? In a long career, with different phases, how much consistency does Maritain display? And how much does any lack of consistency on his part open up his reputation to being taken up and used by factions with their own agendas? Does any fragmentation mean his reputation can never be truly stable? As Molnar said (already referred to in this chapter): are we challenged by a man who could never truly synthesise his philosophy and politics, and who remained strangely ambiguous?

## Chapter Six: What significance does Maritain hold today for French Catholic-Jewish relations and for the Catholic Church?

### Introduction

By the mid-1960s Maritain was largely forgotten in France. Resident in a religious community when *Le Paysan de la Garonne* appeared in 1966, Maritain seemed jarringly out of tune with the increasingly secular mood of the age. Yet, at precisely the moment that he was viewed by many as an anachronism, he was also being venerated by the Catholic Church (itself in the headlines as a result of the Second Vatican Council), most notably in 1965 by the Pope personally. Furthermore, although Maritain's works may have languished on French bookshelves, he was still being read with keen interest and admiration in the Americas. His absence from France, many years before the ever-renewing and sustaining enablers of the virtual age, contributed doubtlessly not only to the indifference shown by those of influence in French intellectual society but also to his own inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to make any meaningful connection with the prevalent atmosphere in France. His caustic dismissals of French life in the 1950s and the unfavourable comparisons he made of its society with that of the United States, discussed in Chapter Five, surely also contributed to a blocking of the path to any re-integration into the bosom of the French intellectual elite. Yet, countering these often self-inflicted obstacles to an adaption to the times and hence, potentially, to acceptance by a contemporary audience, was the fact that Maritain still held firmly to his belief that eternal values should be reenergised constantly and re-clothed in contemporary dress fit for and relevant to the particular age. This tailoring of the eternal to the current (but

only to the extent of non-compromise of the eternal's essential core) Maritain saw as the mechanism for keeping vital truths alive in the hearts of a modern audience. We have already seen on a number of occasions throughout his works this desire to re-clothe 'truth'. As illustration, there is the striking example, shown decades before the 1960s in *Humanisme intégral*, where, rather than advocating the wholesale reestablishment of medieval guilds, Maritain called only for the return of the intrinsic spirit of these guilds, a spirit which would inspire and guide modern practice and habit. At a stretch, this re-clothing of truth might be interpreted, at some level, as at least a willingness to engage with the zeitgeist, even if this desire was not immediately apparent to 1960s French readers. Nor was Maritain completely averse to offering overtly olive branches to subsets of popular culture, even in his later years, as exemplified by his positive overtures to 1970's 'hippy' scene in *De L'Église du Christ*. However, even taking these apparent concessions to the times into account, the Maritain of a decade previously, that is, the Maritain of 1960, was one broken by the death of his wife and adrift in the land of his birth, which had all the appearance to him of a foreign country. Perhaps, however, the tale of the diminishment of his reputation in France at that time is a simple one, explained by common reasons rather than complex ones. All that might have happened, after all, was that Maritain had met the same fate as the vast majority of writers and philosophers, in that his light had waxed and now was waning and coming to a natural end unless some future change in context restored it to relevance. Yet, whether this was the case, or whether he had just been forgotten about and his reputation temporarily mislaid, instead of disappearing quietly, Maritain chose to dig in his heels against the encroachment of both modernity and the fading brightness of his own spotlight. In *Le Paysan de la Garonne* he unleashed a blistering condemnation of post-Vatican Council French Catholicism and its adherents. He

criticised this society sharply- one which, in his view, had embraced all that the material world had to offer and yet had trivialised and sanitised the spiritual. As discussed in Chapter Five, critical reaction to Maritain's attack was, at best, one of sorrowful bewilderment and, at worst, one of a clear manifestation of outright hostility. Even though many people read the book in France as well as abroad no one was particularly happy with it. Thus, through this creation of controversy, Maritain came to emerge from the oblivion he had found himself confined to on his return to France. He had, in fact, become someone who mattered again because, at the very least, he provoked an extreme reaction, even if that very reaction actually ensured his departure from the French intellectual stage soon after the initial fuss had died down. Yet why was such an apparently forgotten and irrelevant figure honoured by the French establishment as recently as 1997? And why, in 2014, is it rumoured, however speculatively, that the Catholic Church is considering him (and Raïssa) for sainthood?<sup>1</sup>

### **Maritain as prism and kaleidoscope**

One conclusion that we might draw is that Maritain's life and work is like a prism or kaleidoscope, which throws out a number of different patterns, colours and shapes. That which the viewer glimpses depends on whichever facet, at any particular point in time, Maritain chooses to present to the world. After all, despite his almost rigid adherence to Thomistic truth for nearly all of his adult life, he was often inconsistent in what he said and what he did, as we have already seen. Nor was he averse to presenting himself in the best light possible. We saw in Chapter Two how thoroughly he tried to

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<sup>1</sup> David H. Lukenbill, 'Sainthood for Jacques & Raïssa Maritain', on website *The Catholic Eye* <http://catholiceye.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/sainthood-for-jacques-raïssa.html> [accessed 5 May 2014].

distance himself from the Action Française when the Papal ban arose and how he blamed others, mainly Clérissac and Maurras, for any involvement he may have had. The distinctive combination of 'l'esprit dur et le coeur doux', which make him so intriguing to read, have left his reputation also unfixed and unstable and his legacy open to a multitude of potential ideological interpretations. Therefore, the patterns, colours and shapes are determined, not only by Maritain's own presentation, but also by the particular lens through which the viewer chooses, consciously or unconsciously, to see him. Furthermore, these interpretations can be taken up and used for a variety of practical purposes and applications. Just as Maritain operated on occasion in an opportunistic fashion, so some people have seized on his reputation in a similar way, taking from it what they need. Paraphrasing Cardinal Wright (as quoted earlier<sup>2</sup>) one could always select something from Maritain's writings to support one's point.

This chapter will examine aspects of the intricacies of the legacy that Maritain has left behind him in France, and the uses that it has been put to by others, whether purposefully or not. Two particular and specific kaleidoscope pictures will be considered. The first is the image of Maritain seen by French Jews as created by their prism, with reference to that created by American Jews. The second picture is that displayed by the prism of the Catholic Church in France. Finally, using current day prisms, the chapter will consider what relevance, if any, Maritain still has both for France in terms of Catholic-Jewish relations and for the Catholic Church, fifty years after the publication of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*.

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<sup>2</sup> Wright, "Vigor in Arduis", p.89.



### **The position of the Catholic Church on Judaism at and after the Second Vatican Council**

Before examining any specific picture or pattern relevant to French Jews, or American ones for that matter, it is relevant to summarise the general position of the Catholic Church, with which Maritain is so inextricably bound, in respect of Judaism in the mid-1960s, during and at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. *Nostra Aetate*, one of the four key outputs of the Council, was, as outlined in Chapter One, a bitterly contested document. It was also a highly significant one. Stephen Schloesser claims that with its publication 'the Church and the papacy had finally come to terms with modernity'.<sup>3</sup> Even though it began life as a document designed to address only Catholic-Jewish relations (it was soon extended to cover the Church's newly-minted engagement with all non-Christians), some Council members were so apparently uncomfortable that they even went so far as to express their desire to exclude any specific mention of the Jews. The version that was eventually released (the fourth and agreed on a simple 'yes/no' basis in the end to bring the never-ending debate to some conclusion) took as its foundation the non-negotiability of a fundamental tolerance for all men, Jews included, irrespective of creed, race and colour. The rationale given for adopting this position was that Christ had preached such an acceptance and the Church must wish to mirror this by a demonstration of its belief that all men, bar none, are made in God's image. As well as an acceptance of the Jews as people entitled to their own faith, *Nostra Aetate* also contained a clear denigration of anti-Semitism, a charge which had haunted the Church before, but particularly through, the years of Nazism. However, the document stopped short of a total damnation, with the word 'condemn', which had been present in an early draft, being sacrificed in the cause of harmony and trade-off, and replaced by the word 'deplore', as follows: 'it (the Catholic Church) deplores all hatreds, persecutions,

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<sup>3</sup> Schloesser, 'Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II', p.290.

displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time or from any source'.<sup>4</sup>

Maritain commented in a letter to Journet how disappointed he was with certain aspects of *Nostra Aetate*; in particular he said that he felt 'une vraie blessure' at the omission of the word 'condemn', believing that the Council had bowed to pressure from the Arab world. Not for the first time, he called on Journet to lobby the Council on his behalf : 'j'espère que vous pourrez agir sur les Pères pour faire rétablir le mot *condamne*, qui est essentiel' (Maritain's italics, COVI 85).

In its most significant and controversial piece of content, *Nostra Aetate* relieved the Jews, for the very first time in living people's memories, of the centuries-attributed charge laid at their door, that of being the killers of Christ ('neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion'). Since this pronouncement some writers have pondered whether the document actually leaves one of the cornerstones of the Catholic Church, the four gospels themselves, open to a charge of anti-Semitism. Certainly as Richard Crane and Brenna Moore present in their recent article, Jules Isaac, the celebrated French campaigner for Catholic reform in Jewish matters and a man generally credited with influencing the genesis and the content of *Nostra Aetate*, as will be seen later in this chapter, saw anti-Semitism as rooted in Christian scripture and so advocated a fresh study of the Gospels to find a new way forward. This renewed stress on the scriptures featured in *Nostra Aetate* itself where Jews and Christians were encouraged to enrich their dialogue with studies of the bible.<sup>5</sup> Even in the present day, the issue is still fresh. In his short work, published by the Catholic Truth Society (and so with a quasi-official status) John Redford considers this point, with particular reference to the first gospel,

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI, 'Nostra Aetate', English translation on Vatican website [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html) [Accessed 4th May 2014].

<sup>5</sup> Crane and Moore, 'Cracks in the Theology of Contempt', p.14.

that of Matthew, in which the Jews apparently call for the blood of Jesus to be on them and on their children.<sup>6</sup> The conclusion, according to Redford, is that such a 'curse', even a self-inflicted one, was not made to last for all time and so is now extinct. Furthermore, any such curse made at that time was taken on only by certain sectors of the Jewish community, the high priests and so on, and thus was not made 'indiscriminately' against the whole people. This brings to mind Maritain's war-time broadcasts, where he excused the French people from any taint of anti-Semitism and blamed instead their leaders in the Vichy government (LM 159).

*Nostra Aetate* was not a lengthy document, barely two pages long, yet it seemed difficult enough for the Council to reach agreement on the small amount of detail it did contain. Cardinal Bea, entrusted in 1960 by John XXIII with the tricky task of guiding the production of the document, chose, on its publication, to compare its pronouncements with the parable of the mustard seed, that is, something very small which also contains the potential for something fruitful and abundant.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, lacking in detail though it might be, *Nostra Aetate* appeared to provide a vitally important blueprint for the future. It certainly gave rise to intense discussion and a wealth of possible interpretations, a process that has continued through the years since the Council right up to the present day, with the set-up of centres for Catholic-Jewish understanding, especially in the United States, to flesh out its slim frame. This ongoing debate actually fulfils one of the recommendations contained in *Nostra Aetate*: 'This (mutual understanding and appreciation) can be achieved, especially, by way of biblical and theological enquiry and through friendly discussions'. To supplement these 'friendly

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<sup>6</sup> John Redford, *Are the Gospels anti-Semitic?* (London: The Incorporated Truth Society, 2004), p.32.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in Giovanni Farquer, 'Nostra Aetate in our time' on website *Sydney Catholic*, August 29<sup>th</sup> 2013 [http://www.sydneycatholic.org/pdf/Sr\\_Giovanni\\_speech\\_in\\_full\\_at\\_St\\_John%27s\\_College.pdf](http://www.sydneycatholic.org/pdf/Sr_Giovanni_speech_in_full_at_St_John%27s_College.pdf) [accessed May 5th 2014].

discussions' further guidance was provided by the Vatican, notably a draft document in 1969 ('Reflections and Suggestions for the Application of the Directives of *Nostra Aetate*') with a greater level of detail still supplied in 1975. It is interesting to note that while the 1969 guidance explicitly excluded any intention of conversion of the Jews, the later guidance did not. Pope St John Paul II, who memorably called the Jews his beloved elder brothers,<sup>8</sup> added his own interpretation in 1985 and at the same time advanced discussions by making several highly symbolic gestures, such as visiting a synagogue and undertaking a visit to Israel, which eased the path of dialogue considerably.

### **Maritain's role in the formulation of *Nostra Aetate***

What was Maritain's role, if any, in the production of this seminal output of the Council? Of course, he had published the collection *Le Mystère d'Israël et autres essais* during the Council's lifetime, which presented, as discussed in Chapter Three, his tidied-up and repackaged definitive stance towards Judaism. With many connections and acquaintances present at the Council, he may indeed have touched the hearts and minds of some of them with this book and, therefore, influenced the debate indirectly. In her recent book Brenna Moore states that his influence actually goes further than any vague and unattributed osmosis between him and Council members, backing her assertion by tracing the input of the two Maritains, Jacques and Raïssa. In the introduction to her book, Moore states that *Nostra Aetate* draws directly from the couple's 'rethinking of the relationship between Jews and Judaism that took place at least three decades before the Second Vatican Council.'<sup>9</sup> She paints a picture of the 'new tribe' Jacques and Raïssa built together as a result of their Sunday afternoon sessions at

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Barnes and Helen Whitney, 'John Paul II: his life and Papacy', on website *Frontline* <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pope/etc/bio.html> [accessed May 5th 2014].

<sup>9</sup> Brenna Moore, *Sacred Dread, Raïssa Maritain, the Allure of Suffering and the French Catholic Revival (1905-1944)* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), p.20.

Meudon during the 1920s and 1930s. This 'tribe' contained a wide range of different types of person who were bound together by the fact they considered themselves as being on the fringes of French society. So, sitting together were intellectuals, exiles and Jews alongside Christians of all denominations who wanted to debate matters of faith in an open atmosphere. However, even in this climate of 'friendly discussion' it would appear that neither Maritain desisted entirely from seeking conversions to Catholicism and both, especially Raïssa, had some success with their Jewish followers. Moore does temper this vision lest the reader think a huge number of Jews converted through their experiences at Meudon, and stresses that the number of conversions was relatively small, with many Jews (Levinas included) instead firmly opposed to what they saw as a betrayal.<sup>10</sup> She attributes some of the conversions inspired by Raïssa as being due not only to the obvious example she provided with her own background and experience as a Jewish convert, but also to the apparent bonds between Judaism and Christianity that she took pains to forge. For example, she called herself a 'juive-chrétienne' and laid stress on the shared alienation of both religions in a fiercely secular society, such that it began to seem for some Jewish attendees but a small step to cross the bridge to conversion, especially, if like her, they could retain their Jewishness and blend it in some way with Catholicism. In addition, embodied in her own 'difference' (her intellectualism, frequent illnesses accompanied by visions, her apparent indifference to domesticity, her child-free status<sup>11</sup>) Catholicism itself seemed exotic and attractive to those who felt they had no place in mainstream society. Perhaps most significantly, she incorporated in her very self a suffering of spirit which drew comparisons between the pain and suffering shared by Judaism and Catholicism, with her own torment as some kind of symbol. This common suffering was a theme which, as we have already seen in Chapter Three,

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, *Sacred Dread*, p.101.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

Jacques also embraced wholeheartedly, especially after Raïssa's death, in his controversial comparison of the suffering of Jesus on the cross with the fate of Jews during the Holocaust.

Yet, even stronger than their thirst to convert, according to Moore, and the key motivation for the Maritains, one shared by their friends and the one which she claims was mirrored in *Nostra Aetate*, was the opportunity to build a community which embraced all religions, even though such an well-intentioned circle also involved constant questioning, dispute and sometimes fighting in the community ranks, as well as strict adherence to Catholicism as the prime sect and non-negotiable point of reference (thus there is still a flavour of Jews needing to complete themselves by becoming Catholics, however much the edges of this point were softened). We can perhaps make a direct comparison between the 1920s/early 1930s and the 1960s at this juncture. The Maritains' ideal 'alternative' community satisfied a prevalent need in the 1920s: the need for exoticism, difference and cosmopolitanism (embodied in many ways, for civic France, in aspects of Catholicism). The community stood squarely opposed to all that was uniform, conforming, liberal and secular.<sup>12</sup> The ideal 'alternative' communities of the 1960s had much in common with that of the Maritains and their followers. However, the vision of exoticism and difference this time round was most definitely not that of Catholicism, which had become identified with the status quo, but one of forms of spirituality possibly unimaginable in the 1920s, and, with the rise of individualism, certainly one that took on a plurality of forms. Regarding those who did convert to Catholicism under the tutelage of the Maritains, Moore presents a number of examples of people who, as a symbol of their conversion, sought to synthesise and fuse Catholicism with Judaism. The mantra of these individuals was that people were not

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.99.

merely one dimensional but multi-faceted and complex. Moore attributes the blossoming of such confident statements to the spirit of unbridled optimism that characterised Parisian society in the 1920s. To this post-First World War society, anything seemed possible.<sup>13</sup> Again, we could draw parallels with the materially affluent optimism of the post-Second World War 1960s. But, as the 1920s turned into the 1930s and as the 1960s progressed, this upbeat mood was to darken and its positive spirit was to vanish. In the case of the 1930s, the 'naive and inadequate'<sup>14</sup> spirit of the Meudon community was to fall into an abyss.

Moore's assertion that the Maritains' vibrant community model inspired *Nostra Aetate* is interesting although perhaps a little tenuous. However, it is possible to see and draw parallels between the arrangement of the Meudon community of the 1920s and early 1930s and the character of the pronouncements of *Nostra Aetate* in the mid 1960s. The spirit of Meudon was very much alive in the Second Vatican Council's seminal output with its urging of tolerance for all men, irrespective of their preferred creed, yet its insistence on the undisputed dominance of Catholicism and the positioning of this tolerance from a Catholic perspective, along with its recommendation that Catholics and Jews should discuss and debate in a 'friendly fashion' with one another to deepen mutual understanding. In addition, the tie between *Nostra Aetate* and Jacques Maritain's own *Le Paysan de la Garonne* in this respect is strong. As seen in Chapter Two, Maritain stated clearly in the book that while a Catholic can have courteous and respectful discussions with those of other faiths, this meant that the Catholic's own core beliefs should never be compromised. Even in more recent times this theme has emerged clearly, helped most notably by Pope Benedict, who, when reviewing the legacy of the Council in 2005, on its fortieth anniversary, stated that much of its work

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.121.

had been misunderstood-there was no dilution of doctrine and, especially, no repudiation of the one truth that men should strive for. As well as creating opportunities for dialogue between men of differing faiths it had also built bridges between faith and reason, which, he said, was especially important in the current day where reason (and science) is so dominant. St Thomas had done this for us already, said Benedict, and the Council had provided 'the dialogue between faith and reason [...] its orientation.'<sup>15</sup>

Yet, what concrete evidence is there to suggest that Jacques Maritain did, in fact, influence *Nostra Aetate*? Although Maritain was not particularly close to Pope St John XXIII, he had, as we have seen already, a deep friendship with Paul VI, who became Pope partway through the Council. Indeed, Maritain, fifteen years the Pope's senior, influenced Paul VI through his early works. We know that the Pope translated one of Maritain's early works and that they saw one another frequently when Maritain was the French Papal ambassador in the 1940s. During this period they worked together on a letter which attempted, with little success, to influence the then Pope to condemn anti-Semitism. In fact, the failure of these endeavours contributed to Maritain's resignation from his post. Influential Catholics such as Congar have commented on their closeness. In terms of Maritain's direct influence on the Pope's outputs, we saw in Chapter One the significant power he took upon himself in respect of the genesis of the Pope's Credo of 1968 (the Pope's profession of faith) and his almost single-handed and uncorrected writing of it. Even so, this evidence of influence on the final version of *Nostra Aetate* is circumstantial only.

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<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Christmas address to the Curia, English translation (Vatican website, December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005)  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html) [accessed May 5th 2014].



One of the main paths leading to the production of *Nostra Aetate* began shortly after the Second World War in 1947 in the small Swiss town of Seelisberg, where the fledgling International Council of Christians and Jews held its second conference. The largest contingent of Christians was actually Protestant by denomination, but also present were a small number of highly influential Catholics, including Maritain's close friend Abbot (later Cardinal) Journet. The Council produced a ten-point statement (or ten theses), one of the first of its kind that, co-authored by Christians and Jews, attempted to reconcile its readers with the atrocities suffered by the Jews during the recently-ended war. Although not physically present at the conference, Maritain sent a letter, read at its opening, urging those present to deal with the menace of anti-Semitism, in order to prevent it from staining whatever little social morality there was left to work with after the devastation of war. This letter is contained in Maritain's collection *Le Mystère d'Israël et autres essais*. He said: 'juifs et chrétiens ont fait route ensemble sur le chemin du Calvaire' (LM 225). As well as making his presence strongly felt it has been claimed <sup>16</sup> that he was the direct source of one of the ten theses of Seelisberg as follows:

Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of

Jesus upon Jews alone. In fact, it was not all the Jews who demanded the death

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<sup>16</sup> Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, 'A Personal Memoir' in *Jacques Maritain and the Jews* ed. Robert Royal, pp. 260-266 (p.264).

of Jesus. It is not the Jews alone who are responsible, for the Cross which saves us all reveals that it is for the sins of us all that Christ died.<sup>17</sup>

This point prefigured closely what was eventually expressed in *Nostra Aetate*, as quoted earlier in this chapter ('neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion'<sup>18</sup>). In fact, many of the theses found an echo in the later document (for example, the stress on the Jewish origins of the Catholic Church and of the key figures in it and the great danger of using stereotypes when referring to the Jews). Jules Isaac was present at Seelisberg, and he persevered in his attempts (with some success) to persuade the Catholic hierarchy to change their teachings on the Jews, right up to the inception of the Second Vatican Council. We can see links beginning to build between Maritain's influence at Seelisberg and the birth of *Nostra Aetate*.

At the time (during the summer and autumn of 1960) that Pope St John XXIII was meeting Isaac (who, in June 1960, secured a Papal audience, of which more to follow) and briefing Cardinal Bea Maritain was, of course, enmeshed in the personal tragedy of Raïssa's final illness and death. However, Maritain and Journet discussed the Council as it went about its business in the early 1960s. Maritain was exceptionally scathing about the Cardinals in attendance, maintaining that, although they were not lacking in faith: '[c]'est plus grave que de la débilité mentale [...] leur foi est restée infantile, embryonnaire, une foi fœtale. Ils ont un bras de géant pour les choses de la

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Christian Rutishauser, 'The 1947 Seelisberg Conference: The Foundation of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 2(2007), 34-53 (p.44).

<sup>18</sup> 'Nostra Aetate', (1965).

‘science’ et du monde; et l’autre bras, celui de la foi, est trop faible pour rien tenir.’<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Journet earlier in the same year, 1963, he talked about the Council members being in a ‘Kindergarten’ and commented : ‘[c]’est drôle de voir les successeurs des apôtres, flanqués d’experts dont la moitié sont pires que modernistes, se faire instruire gentiment par lesdits experts’ (COV 569). The savage criticism of ‘modernists’ is one familiar to the readers of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. However, what is particularly interesting is that these accusations were launched when the Council had barely begun, two or three years before it completed its work and before it had produced any significant outcomes. One must conclude that Maritain was not well-disposed to the Council’s efforts from a very early stage. Through their correspondence, one sees Maritain and Journet plotting how to influence the Council. This was done mostly through the Swiss Jesuit Cardinal Cottier until Maritain lobbied for Journet himself to be made Cardinal and thus attend the latter stages of the Council (Chenaux attributes this to the Pope’s desire to bring Maritain’s influence to the Council,<sup>20</sup> even if this influence had to be highly diluted to suit the compromises needed at the table and even if some of Maritain’s more extreme views on such matters as the Jewish claim to Palestine had to be suppressed entirely). Cottier was of the same mindset as Maritain and Journet and a specialist in the area of ‘non-believers’. Even as late as 2010 he commented (in an article embellished with a photograph of Maritain at his presentation to the Pope in 1965) that there is a truth which can be found if one seeks it, only one Church and varying forms of Christendom, depending on the time and the culture. This could almost

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Journet and Jacques Maritain, *Journet Maritain Correspondance Volume V 1958-1964* (Saint-Maurice : Editions Saint-Augustin, 2006), p. 654. Henceforth *Correspondance Volume V* (COV).

<sup>20</sup> Philippe Chenaux, ‘Paul VI et Maritain’ in *Jacques Maritain et ses contemporains*, ed.by Bernard Hubert and Yves Floucat (Paris: Desclée, 1991), pp. 323-342 (p.338).

come from Maritain's own pen.<sup>21</sup> As an example of their combined influencing strategy, Journet asked Maritain (in a letter from 1964 when the debate of *Nostra Aetate* was raging hard) whether he had retained a copy of the letter he had worked on with the future Paul VI in 1946 for him to send on to Pius XII (a fruitless endeavour as the latter barely acknowledged it).<sup>22</sup> The letter contained a plea for the Church to condemn anti-Semitism solemnly. Journet commented in 1964 that the letter would now be very 'précieuse' (COV 670). We have no record of whether Maritain obliged with a copy, as his next letter is dated six months later (he was engrossed in matters relating to the publication of Raïssa's journal). However, Paul VI may have retained his own copy. Certainly Maritain's 1946 letter contained the kernel of his belief, as he called for the 'great reconciliation that the Apostle announced and which the Church has never ceased desiring' (COV 670) and Pius XII's indifference to it drove him to despair at the end of his time as French ambassador to the Vatican. As at Seelisberg, Maritain anticipated the tone of *Nostra Aetate* many years in advance of its publication. However, despite his now obvious influence on the document we have seen already how disappointed Maritain was with certain aspects of *Nostra Aetate*, especially by the omission of the word 'condemn' when talking about the Church's stance on anti-Semitism, believing that the Council had bowed to pressure from the Arab world.

### **French society and the Jews in the 1960s**

We have already seen in earlier chapters that some critics believe France to have had anti-semitic tendencies, not only during the high tension years of the Dreyfus affair in the late nineteenth century, but throughout the Second World War years and even up

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<sup>21</sup> Georges Cottier, 'Vatican Council II: Tradition and modern issues' *30 DAYS*, issue 1 (2010).

<sup>22</sup> Chenaux, 'Paul VI et Maritain', p.332.

to more recent times. The arrival of Jews from North Africa after the Algerian conflict (estimated at around 130,000) added to tensions already present. Robert Paxton, for example, attributes some of this prejudice to the unwillingness of the Jews to submit to that cultural uniformity which he feels characterises French society,<sup>23</sup> and his point is echoed by Maud Mandel.<sup>24</sup> Brenna Moore shows the attraction of some Jews to the Maritain's embryonic 'alternative' community at Meudon with its lack of enthusiasm for conformity and its desire for social diversity. She also cites Ruth Harris's article on the French secular attitude to religious symbols, which considers them to be oppressors of freedom (from nuns' habits in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries through to the current debate about the wearing of the burqua), concluding that: '[w]ithin the philosophical program of the *laïcité*, Jews were seen as "particular" and hence incapable of genuinely assimilating to universal citizenship'.<sup>25</sup>

It is as if the mysterious otherness of the Jews prevented them from being part of the rational, scientific and secular majority. What of French Jews; how did they see themselves, particularly after the Second World War? As we established earlier Mandel makes clear that on the whole the Jews did not protest vociferously about the many evil acts perpetrated against them and most of them preferred to try to fit back as quietly and as unobtrusively as possible into a French society that had rejected them. In doing so, they appeared to be making efforts to address the alleged concerns of the French non-Jewish population that the Jews could not 'belong', as described by Paxton and Mandel. In addition, the French Jews' general silence did not contradict, and may even

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<sup>23</sup> Paxton, *Vichy France*, p.175.

<sup>24</sup> Mandel, *Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France*, p.11.

<sup>25</sup> Moore, *Sacred Dread* including reference to Ruth Harris "How the Dreyfus Affair Explains Sarkozy's Burqua Ban", p.31. This article can also be viewed at <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/12/how\\_the\\_dreyfus\\_affair\\_explains\\_sarkozy\\_s\\_burqa\\_ban](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/12/how_the_dreyfus_affair_explains_sarkozy_s_burqa_ban)> [accessed 27th July 2014].

have contributed to, the required post-Second World War narrative that all French people, irrespective of creed, stood together shoulder to shoulder in heroic solidarity during the Nazi oppression. De Gaulle's government was especially focused on this myth of unity and harmony and was not keen to single out any one group who might have considered itself to have suffered more than any other. It was only during the 1960s that any objective critical re-examination of what had actually happened during the war took place, conducted against the backdrop of the blossoming of what Kristen Ross describes as the turning away from the collective, which included communal worship and shared narratives, towards an insulation of the individual and his family in the material comfort of his home.<sup>26</sup> Therefore the rapid splintering of the community and the rise of material individualism began to tear apart the story of the solidarity of Jew and non-Jew in France. However, it would still take thirty years for the narrative to be dismantled in public. Maritain had a starring role when this finally happened.

While the beginnings of the end of the myth were taking root, the Second Vatican Council was facing one of its biggest challenges, that is, the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*. Karl Rahner and a team of theologians (including the young Josef Ratzinger, the future Benedict XVI, who was one of his assistants) recorded several volumes of detailed commentary of how each of the Council's key outputs came to life. The notes on *Nostra Aetate*, written by John M. Oesterreicher (himself a Jewish convert and a friend of both Jacques and Raïssa Maritain) are particularly long, as the team tracked the tortuous path of discussion, horse-trading and painfully negotiated amendments. Oesterreicher started his record by telling the reader that he wanted to write down everything 'to

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<sup>26</sup> Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p.11.

avoid false interpretation',<sup>27</sup> which gives an idea of just how sensitive the subject was. He tells the reader of the suspicions of a Jewish conspiracy on the part of some Council members (albeit a small number) and how the word 'condemn' in respect of anti-Semitism came to be removed besides detailing the appeasement process and compromises reached with Council members based in the Arab world (therefore confirming Maritain's view). He also reports on both the good and the bad done to delicate relationships by Paul VI himself with his historic and much lauded pilgrimage to Jerusalem which was almost undermined by his occasional almost unconscious tendency to repeat in his speeches some of the very accusations against the Jews that the Council was trying to put to rest. The commentary also talks of the many appeals made by Jews to the Council, mostly from America, but on one significant occasion from France. Jules Isaac, influential at Seelisberg as seen earlier, had already brought influence to bear on Pius XII in the 1950s and had achieved the removal of some of the more offensive terms used about Jews in Catholic Good Friday prayers. However, his firmest ally was Pope St John XXIII, with whom he appeared to have a bond. At his Papal audience in June 1960 Isaac petitioned the Pope to include the issue of Catholic teachings on the Jews in the subjects for discussion at the recently-announced Council. He himself had rediscovered his Jewish roots by studying the Christian New Testament and working backwards in time to the Old Testament. His case focused on the injustice of the portrayal of the Jews in Catholic liturgy, and the strongest weapon in his armoury was his reference back to the sixteenth-century Council of Trent where it had been decreed already that the Jews were not guilty of deicide. Instead, it was made clear that it was all sinners who had put Christ on the cross (something which Maritain himself agreed with wholeheartedly, saying on more than one occasion that it was he who had crucified Christ. This is also

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<sup>27</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler ed., *Commentary on the documents of Vatican II Vol. 3* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p.1.

reflected in the thesis apparently attributed to him at the Seelisberg conference). Therefore, the conclusion had to be drawn that the Church had lost its way over the intervening four hundred years, probably for a whole host of dubious reasons. Pope St John XXIII had already given hope to Isaac that change might be on the way through his removal, in 1959, of even more of the offensive liturgy of Good Friday. His successor Paul VI made further revision in 1970, finally removing any hint of a prayer for the conversion of the Jews (although in 2007 Benedict XVI caused considerable controversy by permitting the deemed backward step of allowing priests to say Mass in accordance with the 1962 Latin version rather than the more liberal 1970 liturgy). Back in 1960, Isaac's words appeared to galvanise Pope St John XXIII, who set in motion a suitable process by that September. Thus, it was a French Jew who played a vital role in helping to set in train the events that led, eventually, to the publication of *Nostra Aetate*. Sadly, neither Isaac nor Pope St John XXIII lived to see the fruits of their discussion. Isaac died in 1963 and so we cannot know whether he would have been content that the document emerged at all, given its intense sensitivity, or would have been bitterly disappointed at its shortcomings.

### **Maritain as part of the French apology to the Jews**

As the myth of war-time solidarity against Nazism fell apart in the late 1980s and 1990s, France began to feel a greater need to single out not just the particular suffering of the Jews but perhaps even more significantly for its pride as a nation, the bravery of those non-Jewish Frenchmen who had made sacrifices and, through their heroism, saved their Jewish brothers. Furthermore, at a time when communal shows of emotion were becoming not only acceptable but expected, there seemed to be the need to express sorrow openly for the part French people had played during the occupation of France.



The first example of such a public declaration came in 1995, on the fifty-third anniversary of the notorious 'Vel d'Hiv' round-up of Parisian Jews, when Jacques Chirac broke the long silence and brought to an end the evasion that had characterised previous presidencies. He talked explicitly about the 'shame' felt by French society that the French state and some of its people had been involved directly in the deportation of Jews to the death camps. However, even this speech was not wholly condemnatory and it also heralded what Chirac called the generous and faithful spirit of France, the land of the Enlightenment, a country that could not be truly anti-semitic. Stories of courage and bravery on the part of individual French citizens, such as families who had protected Jewish neighbours and policemen who had turned a blind eye, thus allowing Jews to escape, were quoted freely. Although Maritain was not singled out by name, one cannot help but be reminded by Chirac's language of Maritain's own wartime broadcasts when he excused the French 'soul' from the dark acts of some of its individual citizens and declared that France could never harbour anti-semitic tendencies; it was incapable by virtue of its learning and its culture. For maximum openness (and publicity), Chirac's statement was quickly followed by notices outside schools in Paris informing passers-by how many Jewish children from the arrondissement had been deported. Chirac also inaugurated the Shoah Memorial and Holocaust Centre in January 2005, giving a speech that condemned anti-Semitism, including its recent reappearances.

The second significant example of a public apology was that given at Drancy, the notorious concentration camp near Paris, in 1997 and was instituted by the French bishops. They issued a declaration on behalf of French Catholics, asking for forgiveness and anticipating the general call to examine collective consciences requested by Pope St John Paul II at the start of the new millennium. In the statement the bishops declared that the Church displayed 'blindness' and did not speak out, instead 'acquiescing

through their silence with these flagrant violations of human rights and leaving the way open to the spiral of death'.<sup>28</sup> For this, and for their indifference, lethargy and weakness in allowing Jewish stereotypes to flourish, which encouraged the spread of virulent anti-Semitism, the bishops asked forgiveness both from God and from the Jews. However, once again, despite the general condemnation, the bishops cited examples of courage and singled out groups and individuals who had provided alternative examples for people to follow. Thus, nameless bishops, clergy and laity and even members of the Protestant faith were lauded, along with, somewhat controversially, Pope Pius XI. Mauriac was also mentioned but in pride of place was Maritain. It was he, said the bishops, who had attempted to show Christians a different way of regarding the Jews and he it was who had tried to warn the French people of the dangers of anti-Semitism. Thus, Maritain was resurrected by the Church. In the minds of many (older) Frenchmen he might have been regarded still as the conservative Catholic who had raised his voice against the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. However, the bishops chose to make no comment on his version of Catholicism, focusing instead that which was useful to them to make their point: his social policy, one that was philo-Semitic and one, crucially, that was made by a home-grown French intellectual.

The impact of the bishops' statement was experienced in a generally positive way by the French Jewish community and its repercussions are long lasting and still commented upon. For example, in 2009 the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France (Crif) honoured the Bishop Emeritus of Saint Denis who had delivered the

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<sup>28</sup> Roman Catholic Bishops of France, 'Declaration of Repentance' on website *Notre Dame de Sion*, September 30<sup>th</sup> 1997  
 <[http://www.notredamedesion.org/en/dialogue\\_docs.php?a=2&id=484](http://www.notredamedesion.org/en/dialogue_docs.php?a=2&id=484) > [accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2014].

statement. At that gathering Richard Prasquier, the president of Crif, declared that he was proud of both the Catholic Church in France, and of its great thinkers of past times who still had presence and significance in the present day. He singled out Charles Péguy and Jacques Maritain. This can be read as an impressive testimony to the relevance that Maritain still has in French Catholic-Jewish relations, even if it applies only to part of his works, and excludes his philosophy and hard-headed theology (the most important things to him personally, of course). Maritain as a champion of constructive Catholic-Jewish relations, well in advance of the times in which he lived, in fact as a prophet of sorts, is the picture created both by the Catholic Church in France, which seemed desperate to hold up such a champion as a trophy, and by those French Jews seeking a closer relationship with the Catholic Church for a whole range of reasons, including, perhaps, political. Ironically, Maritain's social writings, as we saw in Chapter Two, lack detail and he had been reluctant to even get involved with such writing until events of the 1930s in Spain and in Germany left him no choice. Ralph McInerny puts this point forcibly in *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain*, saying (memorably) that Maritain was 'far more interested in atemporal things, and his excursions into the practical put one in mind of Plato's philosopher being dragged against his bent into the political realm, something that happened again and again over Maritain's long career'.<sup>29</sup> Robert Ventresca tells us of the 'paradox [...] between prophetic vision and practical opacity'.<sup>30</sup> He cites Yves Simon who often expressed his concern that Maritain's vague pronouncements, while ideal for individual contemplation, might stifle action.<sup>31</sup> Yet, often, as at Seelisberg, Maritain is seen as an inspiration or a kind of pure guiding spirit

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<sup>29</sup> Ralph McInerny, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p.64.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Ventresca, 'Jacques Maritain and the Jewish Question: Theology, Identity and Politics', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* Volume 2, Issue 2 (2007), 58-69 (p.68).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

(ironically, Maritain himself saw his wife, with her poetry, visions and suffering, as his atemporal muse, and used her poetry on occasion to lift his prose into the abstract and the mystical, with *Le Paysan de la Garonne* being a clear example, as we saw in Chapter Two). The more cynical critic might say that Maritain appears naive and at the mercy of the unscrupulous. Maurras springs to mind as one of his earliest manipulators; and almost a century later, the process may have been starting all over again.

### **Maritain and American Jews: the prism**

As we saw earlier in this chapter the Frenchman Jules Isaac had a significant influence on Pope St John XXIII in terms of achieving amendments to parts of the Good Friday liturgy and in providing impetus to the beginnings of what would eventually become *Nostra Aetate*, a work that might also be viewed as one of Maritain's greatest achievements. Compared with France, the position of American Jews was more established and they were more highly organised. A good example of this is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ('the joint') which supported humanitarian causes and gave financial assistance to groups of Jews world-wide, including those in post-war France, many of whom, as we have seen, lost their homes and possessions. American Jews sent a number of pleas, sometimes orchestrated, to the Second Vatican Council about their position of perceived injustice at the hands of the Catholic Church, to such an extent that some of the Council members became hostile to what they perceived to be their over-developed influence and general pushiness. One of the key Jewish figures in the debate was Rabbi Abraham Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Heschel, like many vocal American Jews, was a refugee who had fled to America in 1940. As well as being a powerful voice in Catholic-Jewish dialogue, he was well-known as a theologian, philosopher and activist in social causes such as the civil rights movement

(and, thus, had much in common with Maritain). In a feature assembled by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2013, he was one of only two philosophers mentioned and quoted: the other is Maritain. And Heschel, like Maritain, had a profound influence on the 1947 Seelisberg emergency conference on anti-Semitism, which is credited with helping to accelerate progress in Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

Turning to how American Jews in general felt at what was actually achieved by *Nostra Aetate*, Rabbi Leon Klenicki, in his article 'Nostra Aetate: A Jewish view "From disputation to dialogue"', comments that '[t]he initial reactions to *Nostra Aetate* within the Jewish community were mixed, ranging from total negativism and prudent criticism to reserved acceptance and enthusiasm',<sup>32</sup> adding that some prominent Jews (like a number of prominent Catholics), sat at the other extreme and wanted any discussion with the Catholic Church to be limited to social matters only and to exclude any religious and theological debate. An observation by Ventresca may be relevant here; he speaks of the asymmetry in the relationship between Christian and Jew, in that the Christian has to define himself in relation to the Jew, because his faith encompasses the teachings of the Old Testament as well as the New, whereas the Jew has no need for the New Testament and so has less to lose than the Christian.<sup>33</sup> Klenicki himself, however, advocated that 'the right Jewish attitude in this situation requires self-searching and a spirit of reconciliation' and that 'certain temptations must be avoided; for instance, total negativism regarding the possibilities and future of the dialogue, based on past experiences. Another is self-pity for past persecutions and pains'. Ultimately, he concluded that self-righteousness on the part of the Jews would serve no purpose other than to reinforce a position of argument and opposition and would block the way to

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<sup>32</sup> Leon Klenicki, 'Nostra Aetate: A Jewish View "From Disputation to Dialogue"' (website of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), October 2005), no page numbers.

<sup>33</sup> Ventresca, 'Jacques Maritain and the Jewish Question: Theology, Identity and Politics', p.68.

constructive dialogue; a discussion that is still on-going, nearly fifty years after the Council. It would seem that the majority of Jews, in America at least, heeded his words.

The third key commentator is Rabbi David Rosen, the international director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee (AJC). He is also one of the four authors of 'Dabru Emet', published in the New York Times in 2000, a statement that attempted to give direction to Jewish-Christian dialogue and hailed the implications of *Nostra Aetate* as 'truly revolutionary',<sup>34</sup> even taking into account the modifications that had watered it down. However, Rosen does add that Jews in some parts of the world saw it as little more than a sop to the guilt the Catholic Church felt over the Holocaust and that it had no theological depth. He claims that this reaction is not one generally held in the United States where religious communities of Catholics and Jews live cheek by jowl, engage in meaningful dialogue and just get on with the practicalities of life. Suspicion is more common in those areas of the world where Catholics do not experience Jews and Jewish life first hand and on a regular basis. Of course, this does not mean that the picture in the United States is entirely without flaw or that, for example, Holocaust deniers do not exist among the American clergy, as the presence of the outlawed Catholic Society of St Pius X shows clearly. Rosen makes the pertinent comment that in those areas where Catholics and Jews do not co-exist and do not have regular exposure to one another, most Catholics have never even heard of *Nostra Aetate*: it makes no impact on them at all. This situation is worsened by the fact that there is no requirement for priests to study *Nostra Aetate* during their training. And

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<sup>34</sup> David Rosen, 'Nostra Aetate, Forty Years after Vatican II. Present and Future Perspectives' (Conference of the Holy See Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry, Rome, 2005). on website <[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20051027\\_rabbi-rosen\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20051027_rabbi-rosen_en.html)> [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014].

there are other stumbling blocks to Catholic-Jewish co-operation in Rosen's view; the reluctance on the part of some Catholics to accept the existence of the Jewish state; the apparently backwards step taken in the notes issued by the Catholic Church for the interpretation of *Nostra Aetate* in 1975, as mentioned earlier in this chapter; and the lack of homogeneity in Jewish attitudes (while the liberal majority of American Jews are willing to engage in dialogue, those of an Orthodox persuasion and especially those in Israel itself have held back).

Looking at the pronouncements of these three key American Jewish figures, what is evident is their shared focus on practical application, engagement with social activity and the identification of barriers with a desire to dismantle them. They have more than a little in common with Alinsky. As discussed in Chapter Five, most of Maritain's output while resident in the United States was concerned with social matters rather than with speculative philosophy. Chapter Five showed the links with the very action- focused Alinsky. Although Yves Simon, Maritain's former pupil and a fellow French refugee resident in the United States, may have criticised Maritain's work for its lack of practical application, few concerns of a similar nature were expressed by prominent American Jews. They seemed happy to take up his prophetic spirit and put the flesh on the bones for him. In fact, the most robust criticism of Maritain comes from Klenicki concerning his more philosophical, potentially theological, anti-semitic pronouncements on the Jews as unfulfilled Christians. The United States seems to have always seen Maritain more through the prism of his achievements in the social arena and from the most recent references to him, such as the bishops' 1997 appraisal, it appears that France may now be moving in the same direction. One interesting footnote is that in the tribute to Maritain seen in the 2013 feature of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, mentioned earlier in this chapter, the one thing that was showcased

from Maritain's exile during the war was not his finely crafted broadcasts to the Free French. Instead we were told that he had but one attributed activity in New York, the place 'where he helped to bring refugees to the United States'.<sup>35</sup> This is an angle of Maritain which is known but is rarely the first thing said about him. It appears to serve a purpose both in its depiction of America as a haven of practical shelter for the dispossessed, and in its use of a great foreign intellectual like Maritain, himself a refugee, to highlight this and himself be lauded for it.

### **Maritain's position in respect of the Jews: in summary**

As with so many things in Maritain's life, his position on the Jews was deeply ambivalent: dividing, put crudely, into his attitudes on social and political issues on the one hand and on the other his stance on those issues that he considered as belonging to the sphere of spirituality and theology. Chapter Three demonstrated that in his youth he was capable of displaying anti-semitic tendencies in both of these areas, for example, in his very earliest works on the subject (the 1921 essay 'A Propos de la «question juive»' is the outstanding example), and that even his later works, although drawing applause from many people for his liberal stance on the social and political issues, caused many more, even some of these very applauders, to deplore what they considered to be his theological anti-Semitism. It is more than obvious that Maritain, at least until his two decades in the United States, was a product of French culture and was steeped in it. We have seen that the homogeneity of French culture can detect problems with those Jews who prefer not to assimilate into it entirely. However, by the late 1930s and even well before his departure for America, Maritain appeared to have modified his position on

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<sup>35</sup> Justice and Accountability after the Holocaust, issued by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013, temporary feature viewed on website on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2013.



social and political issues from the one he held in the early 1920s, and crystallised it from then onwards into his pluralistic philosophy, recognising and appreciating the different textures and nuances embodied in Jewish culture. This reached a peak in the years of the Meudon discussions and the bringing together of a community, radiating out from Catholicism and also bringing Jewish history and culture with it.

Yet despite this support for the Jews as individuals and even as a people, Maritain still seized the opportunity just a few years after Meudon and on more than one occasion, during his broadcasts of the Second World War, to excuse the French of the anti-Semitism that some saw as deeply ingrained in the French psyche. Whether to elicit sympathies from his American hosts or even to put pressure on them to enter the war, he insisted that France's German oppressors and the Vichy government had forced innocent Frenchmen to comply with a brutality which was against their very nature, with the result that 'the soul' of France suffered grievously. Even this mention of the very existence of a French soul, thus a soul owned collectively, leaves little room for any difference or individuality, especially for the 'particular' and individual nature of the Jews. In theological matters, as we have seen, Maritain never saw Jews as anything other than unfulfilled Christians, even in his most liberal years at Meudon when he was most open to discussion and debate, and he went on to intensify and inflame the hostility that this awakened in many people by grouping Jews with Christians as minorities which shared the pain of a deep persecution by a materialistic, superficial and 'pagan' society. Ultimately, by putting Jews and Christians not just in the same community but on the same societal grouping, he minimised differences, and despite emphasising similarities, still sought the conversions of 'unfulfilled' Jews to Christianity.

Even taking this into account, we can still see, traced in this chapter, his role in the difficult and protracted production of one of the most critical interventions in Catholic-Jewish relations, the flawed and compromised but ultimately much admired and deeply historic *Nostra Aetate*. Thus, even though Maritain might indeed have excused the French of anti-semitic practices during the war, when it was evident that they were not entirely innocent, and even though many Jews and (non-Jews) might take issue with his theological stance on Judaism, nevertheless Maritain made a major impact on the progress of a vital relationship and his influence continues to be felt to the present day. The fact that his reputation may be seized upon to promote different aspects of the man and his work depending on the case the interested party wishes to make, could be viewed as unfortunate but yet acceptable in the context of his overall achievements.

### **The French Catholic prism**

We have already seen how the French bishops presented Maritain as a hero in their landmark declaration of 1997. However, one of the challenges of determining how Maritain is viewed through the prism of French Catholics is that, rather than just one, there are a variety of potential prisms available within the Catholic Church. As demonstrated in Chapter One, Thomism had been revived in the nineteenth century in an attempt to ensure that the faithful all followed the same path. However, even from the outset, this initiative proved to be little more than a hope and a prayer and disputes soon broke out over whether, among other things, Thomism was something that was eternally timeless (the view of those in the tightly controlled Neo-Thomistic camp of Garrigou-Lagrange) or whether it was something actually firmly rooted in its time (the position of Gilson, de Lubac and others). The divisions grew as the twentieth century

progressed and the internal conflict grew ever bitterer as the Vatican attempted to suppress dissent. It had been hoped that the Second Vatican Council would let in the healing effect of 'fresh air', yet, as we have seen, the splintering continued, only with even more divisive topics to fight over, such as the role to be played by the laity, whether Mass should be in the local language or in Latin and how widely the hand of friendship should be offered to those of other faiths, including Jews. Even up to the present day it is challenging to locate one single typical prism for a Catholic, French or otherwise, despite the constancy of the fundamental theological teachings of the Church. There are just so many areas of divergence on social and political matters. Furthermore, although membership of the Church has thrived in some parts of the world, it has shrunk in France, leaving Catholics more marginalised in French society and with less opportunity, even if they wanted one, to speak definitively as a like-minded body. However, a degree of unity can be glimpsed in the significant statement issued in 1973 by the French bishops' Committee for Relations with Jews to French Catholics. This began by reiterating the bishops' support for *Nostra Aetate* and in particular for its reinforcement of St Paul's seminal image of Christian branches being grafted onto the Jewish olive tree, which was explored in Chapter Three (and forms a key part of the text of *Nostra Aetate* itself). The bishops also stated that although the document marked a profound shift in the Catholic Church's attitude to the Jews, it could be only a beginning of the process and the way forward had to be through detailed discussion and further explanation and guidance (this was of course the very intention of the statement). The language used is considerably more direct and harder-hitting than that contained in *Nostra Aetate*. On this occasion, the bishops did not shy from 'condemning' anti-Semitism and also called strongly for desistance in employing crude caricatures when

describing Jews, giving examples like 'usurious' and 'conspiratorial'.<sup>36</sup> Neither did the bishops hold back from giving clear and (fairly) detailed guidance to their flock. Whilst not advocating that the state of Israel should be left entirely to the Jews, the bishops urged Catholics not to rush to any snap decision about the fate of the nation that may dismiss the claims of the Jews against those of people of other faiths. The bishops encouraged Catholics to seek an understanding of Jewish life and Jewish culture so that they no longer lived in ignorance and mistrust of these, but instead forged a 'living bond' with Judaism. This direction was very much in keeping with what the American Rosen said. If the statement of the bishops can be taken as a prism through which French Catholics might view Maritain, then they can create only a positive picture of the prophet of, and key person of influence on, *Nostra Aetate*.

#### **Particular aspects of Maritain's relationship with France and French society**

While the prism through which French Catholics might glimpse their picture of Maritain is multi-faceted, due to the lack of group coherence, and while Maritain's own complexity makes the picture even more nuanced, there are two further factors which impact on how he might be viewed, not only by French Catholics but also by those of a more secular tendency. The first is one of proximity to his homeland - or the lack of it at key points in history. One could almost say that Maritain was unlucky in his timing, being never quite in the right place at the right time, especially in the later stages of his career. Thus, after the Second World War, instead of returning to Paris, which was rebuilding itself and engaging with the high energy of debate on existentialism and new theological ideas, Maritain went (reluctantly) to Rome at de Gaulle's request, and, even though he

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<sup>36</sup> Statement by the French Bishops' Committee for Relations with Jews, April 1973  
 <[http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/french\\_bishops.htm](http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/french_bishops.htm)> [accessed May 4th 2014].

tried to catch up later, became excluded from the discussion and thus from making his mark. Returning to France eventually in 1961, he found that his native country had moved on and left him behind. Therefore, he was never quite able to become a central figure in philosophical matters, as he may have wished. The second factor that should be considered is his very attitude to debate and challenge, particularly in his later years. In the early part of his career Maritain appeared to be somewhat malleable, open to the persuasion of his wife, his early spiritual advisers such as Clérissac and those he admired, such as Bloy, as well as political manipulators like Maurras. With the zeal of the newly converted he became seduced by the Action Française, was involved heavily on its fringes, and was influenced perhaps by the charismatic figure of Maurras himself. During the Second World War, he allowed himself to be persuaded by de Gaulle to broadcast to the French from exile. His attachment to particular individuals could certainly sway him. He appeared to enjoy the cut and thrust of debate, in his earlier years, as the Sunday afternoons at Meudon demonstrate. As he grew older, perhaps inevitably he became more intransigent. Although deeply fond of Alinsky, the relationship was paternalistic and the younger man appeared to do most of the running. Yet even this increasingly tough stance on relationships was outstripped by his firmness of attachment to his ideas. Maritain had always linked his books one to another, reinforcing his message at any one particular point in time by revisiting an earlier work. One clear example of this tendency emerged in his 1947 comments on existentialism, contained in *Court traité*. As discussed in Chapter Four, this was his attempt on his return from Rome to get involved with the current philosophical trend. However, in this work, he made little effort to engage in any real debate with other philosophers such as Sartre but instead preferred to make his points by reference to his work of fifteen years previously, *Sept leçons*. It is almost as if he believed that if he shouted increasingly more

loudly his points would eventually get through to people. This rigid adherence to his own theological and philosophical beliefs chimed well with the Catholic Church as it positioned itself during the first half of the twentieth century when it was trying to impose harmony. It sat less well of course with the Church of the Second Vatican Council, where key outputs such as *Nostra Aetate* invited and encouraged communal discussion and debate. *Le Paysan de la Garonne* is, as has been shown, dogmatic and didactic in tone (with Congar saying of Maritain in 1967, as we have seen, that his type of extreme Thomism was almost 'virulent' (COVI 407)). Furthermore, Maritain took himself very seriously in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*, despite the obvious heavy puns (like the title of the book). The lightness of touch that was present in, say, 1922's *Antimoderne*, is singularly lacking. As well as being out of touch with the mood of the Church, perhaps Maritain's unwillingness to debate, at least in theological and philosophical matters, was out of step also with the rational style of debate that is part of French culture. And Maritain is on a different page in another way. The French approach to theology in the 1960s seems to be one, perhaps even more so than the American position, that was filtered through social and political concerns, which of course Maritain kept separate ('hard head, soft heart'). As the divide between the theological and social narrowed almost to the point of disappearing in the prism used by French Catholics, the less anyone, neither those people who leaned to the political right nor those who leaned to the left, found anything to identify with in *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. In some ways, it might have been easier for those Frenchmen of secular disposition to find something of worth in Maritain's work. They could, after all, put to one side his troubling theology and deal directly with his social message, which had the potential to win them over (although even this might be a struggle with the dour and bitter tones of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*).

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced Maritain's involvement in the production of *Nostra Aetate*, concluding that he did indeed influence this significant statement made by the Catholic Church. The importance of *Nostra Aetate* itself is almost impossible to underestimate when one looks at pronouncements made by the Church before its appearance, including the harsh and condemnatory prayers that were customary on Good Friday, and its gaping silences at times of the horrors perpetuated against Jews. Of course, Maritain did not single-handedly bring *Nostra Aetate* into being but his works throughout his career and then the care he took to position himself as a person with influence at the Council were key instruments of its genesis. As Ventresca says:

It is not my intention to suggest that a lone philosopher, with a fairly modest albeit growing reputation in fairly confined French cultural circles, could have effected such a movement from within Catholicism. My point simply is to underscore the embryonic and under-developed state of Catholic thought on the Jewish Question well into the interwar era. In this respect, Jacques Maritain's thought on the Jewish Question can be seen as a kind of microcosm of Catholic thought more generally on the subject; of the vulnerability of

thinkers who were sympathetic to the Jewish people and cognizant of the Jewish roots of Christianity.<sup>37</sup>

In many ways, *Nostra Aetate* is one of the biggest achievements of Maritain's long career, however disappointed he may have felt personally at the dilution of some of the messages he wanted it to contain. *Nostra Aetate* had and still has its critics, but it also has its many supporters and the number of these has grown over the decades as the document has been discussed and its implementation debated. As the mood in France changed to one of public expressions of contrition in the 1990s, Maritain's reputation glittered once again as he was presented as the key example of a good Frenchman fighting anti-Semitism. Above all it is the social and political aspects of his work that are lauded and which have won him his lasting legacy in Catholic-Jewish relations. The 'hard head' of *Le Paysan de la Garonne* is conveniently ignored or forgotten about altogether. This aspect of Maritain, the most essential part as he saw it (after all, he called *Le Paysan de la Garonne* his testament), has been airbrushed away. Even his rumoured elevation to sainthood (alongside Raïssa) seems attributable to the way he lived his life, that is the life of an ideal lay person, reflective and contemplative yet also involved with humanitarian causes in the outside world. The 'soft heart' seems to be what most people want to remember about Maritain, even if this is only half of his story. How Maritain himself might have felt about this is another question altogether.

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<sup>37</sup> Ventresca, 'Jacques Maritain and the Jewish Question: Theology, Identity and Politics', p.68.



## Conclusion

This thesis has examined Maritain's theology and philosophy with particular reference to *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. It has demonstrated clearly that, throughout his life, Maritain championed the right of each man to follow his own conscience, to defend his beliefs (and to be respected for doing so). He advocated that all men are equal in socio-political terms yet at the same time he insisted that the Catholic faith is the one true religion, to which all men belong in varying degrees. The thesis has analysed one key example of what Maritain himself deemed 'l'esprit dur et le cœur doux'. Whilst retaining throughout his life an uncompromising attitude to the Jew's position as an unfulfilled Christian, Maritain was not only a champion of the individual Jew's human rights in his stance against anti-Semitism but, as this analysis has made clear, also a key architect of the Catholic Church's seismic shift in attitude towards the Jewish people through his influence on the production of *Nostra Aetate* at the Second Vatican Council. The thesis has built a compelling case which shows that his impact is felt not only on isolated individuals but also on whole communities and institutions, both Catholic and Jewish, around the world.

It has also demonstrated that Maritain made a mark on the work of Saul Alinsky, who in turn has had an impact on modern American politics, albeit one that is often deliberately hidden from overt gaze and scrutiny. This influence, which made a deep impact on Hillary Clinton, is particularly recognisable in Barack Obama, who in turn (like Alinsky) has a fondness for the Catholic Church and values its work. Furthermore Obama appears to see the Church as an important mechanism in bringing about desired change in a global context. This is apparent from his recent discussions with Pope Francis, which took place at the time when the Pope was orchestrating the worldwide

'muscle' of the Church's membership to effect meaningful change in crimes against the person such as people trafficking, and in which he seemed anxious to build a good relationship. There is every sign during these early days of Pope Francis's office that there will be further wide-scale practical action, possibly with temporal political assistance from the United States and also, potentially, from more unlikely sources as suggested by the Pope's overtures to both sides in the Middle East shown during his visit to the Holy Land in spring 2014.

The thesis has unpicked how these two weighty achievements on the part of Maritain came about and has demonstrated their significance, set as they were against a backdrop of rapidly changing events in the first seventy years of the twentieth century and Maritain's residences in two countries with very different geopolitical climates. Maritain's considerable successes have come to fruition sometimes despite his own lack of judgement and in the face of his naivety and opportunism. Furthermore they have blossomed regardless of the opportunism of others. This makes them yet more remarkable and provides even more guidance and lessons for the modern reader, particularly if he or she is a practical theologian, a humanitarian or a political figure.

Thus the thesis has shed new light on how Maritain's accomplishments have influenced systems and institutions as well as individuals. It has also demonstrated that Maritain has made a substantial contribution to both the religious and political spheres, an impact that is seen and felt to the present day. While these might be reasons for resurrecting his reputation in France and beyond, fifty years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, on their own they are not quite enough. Even more pertinent are the answers his version of pluralistic personalism provides to modern-day dilemmas such as the rise of the far-Right in France and the rest of Europe and the re-emergence of racism

and anti-Semitism, which are once more gaining in prominence in mid-2014. In addition the stiffening backbone which his policies could provide to Pope Francis in his practical work counts for a great deal. The Pope has indicated that the work of the Second Vatican Council is not yet complete and one of his key advisers has made comments about the influential nature of Maritain's work on social and political issues thus far in the journey. This gives cause for hope that his input will continue to be helpful.

Further work can be done. This might include a more granular application of the tool-box principles first outlined in 1936 in *Humanisme intégral* to the challenges of modern-day France and beyond. In addition an analysis of Maritain's correspondence with leading figures in South America might be made. This would supplement the original work that this thesis has done on the correspondence between Maritain and Journet and between Maritain and Alinsky. It would be especially relevant as the sub-continent begins to take on a bigger role in the world, having provided the first-ever South American Pope; one who has signalled his intent to have real global impact. Of course if any campaign for the canonisation of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain were to gather momentum, one could also anticipate more opportunistic appropriations of aspects of the kaleidoscope of Maritain's 'soft heart' in France (and of his spirit and soul) to illustrate the points of various factions. There is, after all, plenty of material to choose from in the kaleidoscope of his magnificent, complex and sometimes contradictory body of work.

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